

Faculty of Arts  
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# Displacing Desire

An Essay on the Moral-Existential Dynamics of the  
Mind-Body Problem

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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## *Abstract*

This thesis is an essayistic exploration of human self-alienation, of the split or strife between the 'inner' and the 'outer', or 'mind' and 'body'. Its central aim is to open up a *perspective* on the problem of the life of the mind, a perspective that suggests a shift in the understanding of this problem from a purely epistemological-ontological (or structural) to a radically moral-existential one.

The thesis begins with a certain idea of the mind-body problem, which is in turn identified as confused and unclear, but out of which a certain general logic and dynamic is distilled. It then moves on to analyse this logic and dynamic and develops a specific perspective on or understanding of it. Perhaps one might say that the 'truth' of the perspective that is opened up lies in the way in which it is able to guide us to a radically moral-existential horizon *without* losing touch with the general logic and dynamics from which it sets out.

One of the central claims that the thesis makes, through the perspective it attempts to open up, is that the 'inner-outer' split, or human self-alienation, concerns a moral-existential displacement of desire, and more specifically, a displaced desire for (social) affirmation. The rationale of this temptation or urge to displace desire, it is argued, lies in the way in which (social) affirmation *phantasmatically* manage to *secure* a (displaced or split) desire from the other. Moreover, it is in and in relation to this logic and dynamic of desire and affirmation that the 'body' or the 'outer' enters the picture and is identified as announcing itself as the *object* and instrument of displaced desire. 'Body' is disassociated from the soul or the 'inner' and its desire, or, alternatively, (mis)identified with it, and thus seen as somehow the *cause* of the 'mind-body strife', or, alternatively, seen as that which somehow necessarily *veils* the 'real of the soul'.

The narrative of the thesis is structured along the following lines. It begins by identifying the contemporary naturalist 'mind-body problem'. Distilling or deciphering out of this, so it is argued, confused problem a general logic and dynamic, the thesis moves on to discuss Francis Bacon's, and more importantly, René Descartes' epistemological outlook and mind-body dualism. Here the discussion centrally revolves around how Bacon's and Descartes' mind-body dualism and the associated mind-body strife binds together epistemology with ethics; their claim that the mind-body strife essentially concerns a 'problem of the will'.

This discussion is followed by an extensive reflection on Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*. The suggestion is that the *Gorgias* ties together the different themes and concerns that have emerged in relation to the discussion on the mind-body strife

and helps clarify issues that remains obscure in Descartes' philosophy and, consequently, in contemporary naturalist philosophy of mind. It is also in connection to the reading of *Gorgias* that one of the central claims of the thesis is developed, namely that the mind-body strife is rooted in a displaced desire for social affirmation. In the final chapter, the central questions and concerns identified throughout the thesis are re-discussed, now with the question of meaning at the epicentre. Drawing on resources identified in both Plato and Wittgenstein, the chapter develops critical perspectives on what is termed the Augustinian-Cartesian picture of the soul and meaning, as well as on Jacques Lacan's theory of (decentred) subjectivity. The final chapter ends with a sketchy account of how the central claims developed in the thesis can be illustrated in terms of 'examples'.

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## *Prologue*

“Human consciousness”, Daniel Dennett writes, “is just about the last surviving mystery [...] a phenomenon that people don't know how to think about—yet.” (Dennett 1991, p. 21) The mysteriousness of consciousness, or, to use the term coined by David Chalmers (1995), “the hard problem of consciousness”, is, in turn, understood to be the challenge of how to place “first-person, subjective experience”—or to use another term “phenomenal consciousness” (Chalmers)—*in* the objective, third-person, world, and, moreover, to explain how an objective world can give rise to such subjective experiences. However, Dennett suggests that “thanks very little to progress in philosophy and very much to progress in science” (Dennett 2006, p. 1) this “mystery” is now, supposedly, on the verge of becoming disenchanted. Namely, Dennett believes himself (and his peers) to be on the verge of a revolutionary breakthrough in the crusade of reason against ignorance and irrationality, a breakthrough that will provide a basic theoretical framework that “will trade mystery for the rudiments of scientific knowledge” (Dennett 1991, p. 22).<sup>1</sup>

Let us suppose that something of relevance is being said here; that the word ‘mystery’ captures something important about human self-conception. If this is so, we ought also to note that Dennett’s way of identifying this “mystery” gives voice to a quite specific way of understanding the nature of the *mystery* of the “mystery of consciousness”; gives voice to a specific form of self-understanding. For, what Dennett is suggesting is that the mystery of the mind/consciousness is akin to the (perhaps already today outdated and non-) mystery of, say, the construction of the great pyramids. Here, in the case of the pyramids, our (once experienced) “bafflement and wonder” (cf. Dennett 1991, p. 22) arises out of the perceived complexity, elaborateness, hardship, etc., underpinning the construction of the pyramids, as well as from our ignorance as to how exactly the ancient Egyptians, Mayans, or Aztecs and others were able to ‘pull it off’. When, on the other hand, we are provided with a reasonable explanation, or better yet, when someone is able to demonstrate to us how the pyramids were built, we might of course continue to feel a kind of wonder and bafflement with respect to the talent and industriousness of the ancients—or whoever might have constructed them. However, the mystery, that is to say, the existential depth

1 Concerning the possibly obsolete nature of this discourse on the life of the mind, and on more recent developments within naturalist philosophy of mind, see footnote 6 below.

invested or perceived in the ‘mystery’, will itself fade away in proportion to our gain in, let us call it, technoscientific knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, and importantly, the existential depth attached to such mysteries, when ‘replaced’ by “the rudiments of scientific knowledge”, will most probably show itself as ridiculous, as childish, as entangled with all kinds of phantasmatic hopes and fears. Hence, technoscientific knowledge not only produces new know-how, but also, in existential terms, somehow exposes our (corrupt?) tendency to misrepresent reality. This, it seems to me, is what Dennett promises to deliver for us in philosophy of mind. —Technoscientific knowledge, it might be said, is understood by Dennett to answer to our childish hope of not being childish; our fear of being driven by fear.

But why would one think that “human consciousness is just about the last remaining mystery”? Why is it that the final frontier of the project of philosophy or knowledge is understood to be, as it were, the very point of knowledge itself, the very point of thought itself? Does it have to do with an *urge* to conceptualise the thought that thinks or knows as an *object* of its own knowledge? What would compel us to do so, what would such an urge stem from? There seems to be—does there not?—a crucial difference between the mystery of the pyramids—or, say, the mystery of e.g. the origins of life or the universe (cf. Dennett 1991)—and that of ‘the mystery of human consciousness’. Namely, the mystery of the pyramids, or the mystery of the origins of life/the universe (at least as it is conceptualised in scientific terms), is not a mystery *for the pyramids themselves*, or for the origins of life or the universe *itself* (as it is conceptualised in scientific terms). This, however, seems to be the case with the mystery of human consciousness; the mystery is, for the one that it is a mystery for, a mystery about itself. The mystery of human consciousness has, in other words, the form of self-alienation; in our self-knowledge we appear alien to ourselves, to what we are—we, in our awareness and knowledge, are alien to that which we nevertheless also and in reality or ‘truth’ are.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> By ‘technoscientific knowledge’, I am simply referring to knowledge understood as essentially a know-*how*. Both in chapters II and III, I will at times shortly indicate and partly explain how and why the conception of knowledge and/or science has become, in the ‘modern’ post Baconian-Cartesian era, primarily understood as technoscientific know-*how*. See also Toivakainen (2015; 2018), Proctor (1991), Taylor (2007).

<sup>3</sup> One might ask what the relation here is to idea of a self-critical ‘turning of mind or reason on itself’ as a path to self-understanding, which Jürgen Habermas identifies as the very point at which the discourse of modernity finds itself. Habermas writes: “Hegel inaugurated the discourse of modernity. He introduced the theme—the self-critical reassurance of modernity.” (Habermas 1987, p. 49) That is, Habermas suggests that it is through his discovery of the peculiar modern idea of reason’s self-critical ‘turning on itself’ that Hegel identifies modernity as a philosophical theme in itself. I thank Thomas Wallgren for pointing this out to me.

Dennett's project seems, then, to contain two different questions; two different challenges. On the one hand, the epistemological project is conceived in terms of treating the mind as an artefact, namely as an object of scientific knowledge, where the 'truth' that we search for is essentially answered in terms of 'how does it work?', 'how is it construed?', 'what is its casual relations to and in the "world"?'. And this we can, and continuously do, do—in some sense. That is, there is a certain sense in which we can be said to continuously accumulate all kinds of knowledge about the 'mind' (as an artefact or mechanism), which can be validated or verified in terms of effective causation—those theories give us, in varying degree, a power over the 'artefact-mind' (cognitive neuroscience, behavioural sciences, psychology etc.).<sup>4</sup> And, we do seem to make all kinds of different revolutionary breakthroughs on this arena—although we seem to be all to disinterested about asking for, and about, the *meaning* of this knowledge accumulation.<sup>5</sup> However, Dennett's project of unlocking the mystery of human consciousness seems not only to aspire to generate a more comprehensive power-knowledge over the artefact-mind. For, the *attempt* to relate to that which relates to artefacts (i.e. mind or thought) as 'itself' an artefact, is a very peculiar, obscure, unclear, kind of relation. It is *not*, in this specific sense, analogous to a relation to a pyramid or to a computer, exactly because the object artefact-mind is always also the thought that objectifies itself; the artefact that *thinks* of itself as *an* artefact. In this sense, Dennett's project could be said to, simultaneously, contain a desire to relate to 'mind' as an artefact and *not* to do so. Whatever this peculiar and obscure attempt and urge might be to relate to that which relates to artefacts (i.e. mind) as itself an artefact, it seems to inform the moral-existential investments in and the greatness, the depth, of the alleged mystery of the mind—and the greatness and depth of the exposure of it.

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In the opening paragraph to his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, James Rachels notes that "[i]t would be helpful"—with respect to Socrates' question "how we ought to live"—"if we could begin with a simple, uncontroversial definition of what morality is" (Rachels 2003, p. 1). Unfortunately, though, Rachels informs

4 Dennett makes this point quite clearly, when he defends himself and his peers against accusations that they misconstrue the 'rules of language' and commit a "mereological fallacy" (cf. Bennett & Hacker 2003). Dennett states: "Do [we] have any right to speak this way? Well, it pays off handsomely, generating hypotheses to test, articulating theories, analysing distressingly complex phenomena into their more comprehensible parts, and so forth." (Dennett 2007)

5 For three somewhat different accounts of the way in which our technoscientifically minded culture and its knowledge accumulation tends to evade important questions about the *meaning* of its project, see Toivakainen (2015; 2016; 2018).

us that the acquisition of such an ideal definition “turns out to be impossible.” (Ibid., p.1) What he instead sets out to do is to search for “the ‘minimum conception’ of morality”, “a core that every moral theory should accept at least as a starting point.” (Ibid., p. 1) Some pages later Rachels then states the minimum conception as follows: “Morality is, at the very least, the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason—that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing—while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by what one does.” (Ibid., p. 14)

Rachels’ motivation for proclaiming that the “morally right thing to do [...] is whatever there are the best reasons for doing” is a quite classical one, namely that our feelings or sentiments can be contradictory and unsound, simplifying, destructive, etc. Hence, “we must try to let our feelings be guided as much as possibly by the arguments that can be given” (Ibid., p. 13). At the same time Rachels however notes that “not every reason that may be advanced is a good reason. There are bad arguments as well as good ones”. “But”, he continues, “how does one tell the difference?” (Ibid., p. 13). We are provided with two complementary answers. First off, “get [the] facts straight”. (Ibid., p. 13) The challenge here is identified as consisting of both a kind of neutral epistemic challenge and of a moral challenge. So, while “‘facts’ are sometimes hard to ascertain—matters may be so complex and difficult”, “[a]nother problem is human prejudice. Often we will *want* to believe some version of the facts because it supports our preconceptions.” (Ibid., pp. 13-14) Secondly, each moral theory should, in order to be rational— that is, good—include “the requirement of impartiality”, which is “nothing more than a proscription against arbitrariness in dealing with people”; “a rule that forbids us from treating one person differently from another *when there are no good reasons to do so*.” (Ibid., p. 14)

Without perhaps clearly noticing it, Rachels has articulated a—or even *the*—queer relationship between the true and the good. Namely, as he in some sense acknowledges, in claiming that in order to be good we need to be rational, he is simultaneously claiming that in order to be (‘properly’) rational we need to be good. More than constituting a vicious circularity, what this ‘interdependence’ between the good and the rational can be understood to illustrate is that the good, which moral philosophy is supposed to be a path towards, must in some sense already be there, as it were, in us, or rather *between* us. Consider for instance Rachels’ claim that in order to be properly rational—and, consequently, properly good—we need to get our facts straight. It seems evident that the very acknowledgement that there is something problematic—both morally and epistemologically—about producing arguments that simply try to justify our own preconceptions already presupposes and, in some ‘basic’ sense, answers to a moral understanding and, perhaps one might say, commitment. The same thing can also be said more generally about the very concept of “fact”, especially as it is used here by Rachels. Say, for instance, that I see someone hitting another

person. Now the ‘facts’ that I am supposed to “get straight” here—so that we can form a truly rational argument, and thus form a sound moral position—are not ‘facts’ in any absolutely neutral, that is, *amoral* sense. For I could just as well report on the different colours, movements, and sounds of ‘objects’, without saying anything about anyone hitting anyone else, and still be reporting, soundly, ‘facts’ about the event and the ‘world’. However, to the extent one is ‘getting facts straight’ about ‘the hitting of another person’, the facts one will be reporting are not arbitrary, but already belong to a specific category of facts, so to speak. In short the facts reported are already grounded in a moral understanding or conception of the situation. So the ‘facts’ one, as it were, ‘pick out’, and which are supposed to be constitutive of any rationally sound position, are always-already embedded within a moral framework, that is, already contain the very thing (the framework of and conditions for ‘moral truth’) that informs the identification of ‘facts’. In other words, to see them as relevant, as significant facts, is to see them as ‘morally’ relevant ones. But if this is so, then getting one’s facts straight, which is supposed to be a requirement for properly rational arguments or reasons, always hinges on the goodness one is open to; the goodness and evil (the moral reality/truth) one understand and is moved by. That is, what ‘facts’ one reports and does not, what ‘facts’ one perceives or searches for, or do not, always-already reflect one’s moral understanding (and, as the case may be, the evasion of it). Perhaps one might even say that the picture portrayed by Rachels suggests—unconsciously?—that reason can never find out any truth about the good/morality beyond the moral understanding. That is, beyond the goodness that *already* exists *in and/or between us*. —Is moral truth, then, more about acknowledgement than about learning something new?

The same logic and dynamics apply to the case of the requirement of impartiality, as noted by Rachels. That is, if impartiality is needed for properly sound rational arguments—if properly sound (moral) arguments are always conducted in an impartial spirit—then it is the moral understanding, the goodness, of impartiality that is the grammatical tie between reasoning and ‘soundness’. *If*, that is, the principle of impartiality *de facto* is good and, consequently, rationally sound, and not, as for instance Nietzsche (1996) is known to argue, a self-deceptive strategy for justifying some corrupt and bitter trait in one’s soul—and what else than our goodness, our openness to the good, could help us see and determine this? Put differently, the moral philosophical question or challenge we can see underpinning Rachels’ identification of the proper object of moral philosophy, seems to give expression to a form of self-alienation, structurally put, not all too different from that found in Dennett’s conception of the “mystery of human consciousness”. That is, the goodness—again, the rational truth—that we want to reach is something that, in some sense, must already be in or be part of us and of our relationship to others. On the other hand, though, we are simultaneously somehow dislocated from this

truth/goodness by some disruptive, displacing, corrupting, force, *also* dwelling within us. In our struggle to locate and connect with ourselves (the ‘truth’ about ourselves), we must simultaneously struggle against (another part of) ourselves. However, the success of this struggle for ‘moral truth’ seems to hinge on the extent to which we are *already* open to this truth; the struggle against (moral) self-alienation hinges on our ability *not* to be (morally) self-alienated. Perhaps one might say that this is what Rachels’ characterisation of moral philosophy *unconsciously* states.

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Let us ask, in a Kantian spirit, what is the presupposition, the condition, for there to be a *mystery* of human consciousness, mind, or soul? At least this: we are in some sense affected by an ‘experience’—or is it a conception?—that there is something in or about ourselves—and the other—that fails to transpire in our encounters with others. If ‘everything’—whatever that might or can mean—about us (and the other), down to the very core of the soul, were immediately present in our encounters with others, what “mystery” about the soul would there be left for us to be baffled about; what more could transpire?

Where, how, and why, is the mind or soul veiled? “That which is most vital”, the Danish theologian and philosopher K. E. Løgstrup writes, “demands a controlled, structured, indirect expression.” (Løgstrup 1997, p. 19) But why? “[D]oes this mean that there are certain things which simply are not to be mentioned? [...] Are there feelings which can exist only as long as we refrain from expressing them but which die the moment we allow them to come to the surface in speech? Does that which is most vital in life wither in the light of day?” (Ibid., p. 19) “No”, Løgstrup, firmly replies, “what we mean is rather that there are certain things [the most vital things] which cannot exist in a formless state.” (Ibid., p. 19) But why this contrast between form/formlessness and indirect/direct expression? “Because”, we are told, “we cannot ourselves create the necessary forms” for our expressions. “Life has been given to us. We do not ourselves create it”, and we are thus necessarily forced to “adopt the conventional forms” that we find in the world into which we are, to use a Heideggerian term, “thrown”. “This is why we cannot give it [the essence of our souls] a direct expression.” (Ibid., pp. 19-20)

The picture Løgstrup gives us is then, so it seems, the following: on the one hand, conventions, language, makes the soul's appearance—its form or expression— possible, while, on the other hand, because the form of the soul's expression does not have its origin in the soul itself but rather in the Other of the conventions, these conventions/expressions simultaneously, in some sense, veil the very soul itself; make the expression “indirect”. However, the alleged

indirectness of the soul's expression is here meant to be a kind of *necessary* feature of the structure of reality: there is, allegedly, no such thing as a direct expression of the soul. But what, then, does it mean to say that the expression of the soul is "indirect", if it does not make any *sense* to say, to think, to fantasise, that it could be direct? Do we not, nevertheless, for some reason, desire the impossible, the unthinkable, the senseless, given that philosophers and laymen alike think or experience that there is a mystery about the 'mind' and, consequently, about its relationship to the body, the outer, expression?

Can it really be that the existential split or strife between the inner and the outer, or the soul and the body (form, appearance, expression), is rooted in a purely structural, or formal, or grammatical, feature of reality? What could be so terrible about formal necessity that it generated an existential split in human beings? How *could* there be anything so terrible in something purely formal or grammatical? And how, why, would and could the existential split arising out of purely formal features of reality then transmute into the kinds of *moral*-existential concerns and dynamics that the 'mind-body' or, alternatively, 'inner-outer' dichotomy has been associated with throughout the history of philosophy? And, consequently, what would be the connection between, on the one hand, the purely formal character of the inner-outer dichotomy and, on the other hand, the dynamics of self-alienation and its *moral*-existential concerns?

# I

## *Introduction*

### Objective

What, if anything, do the three short characterisations in the *Prologue* have to do with each other? What kind of sense, logic, dynamics, ties them together, if any? The present thesis is an essay that explores such questions. In other words, it is a thesis on the 'mind's', or 'soul's', or the 'inner's', relationship to the 'body', or the 'outer'; a thesis on the mind-body 'strife' and 'problem'. However, or, moreover, the thesis as a whole is an attempt to introduce a perspective on the discourse of mind that suggests a need for a shift or relocation from its current state—especially as it comes to expression in contemporary naturalist discourse (cf. Dennett's 'mystery of the mind')—to a radically moral-existential framework. There is, to my mind, a double sense to this relocating. Namely, it is a relocating in the sense of re-establishing a moral-existential discourse that has, due to a progressive unfolding of an initial externalisation or displacement, become forgotten, hidden in, and/or abstracted from, the contemporary naturalist 'mind-body problem'. In addition to this, though, it is also a relocating in the sense of placing the source of the moral-existential concern of the discourse of the mind in what is at least in some sense a quite new location—be it one that could be, topologically speaking, characterised as simply deeper within or beneath the paradigmatic discourses presented throughout this thesis.

It might perhaps be said that a central aspect of the perspective I try to open up is that the mind-body or inner-outer split or strife is expressive of moral-existential difficulties rooted in the life between individuals, and the depth of responsibility this in-betweenness constitutes. Moreover, my claim will be that the pervasive tendency to localise the source of the mind-body strife or problem in purely formal or structural features of reality, is itself the deployment of a strategy to evade or displace the moral-existential reality of the 'truth of the soul'. The discourse of mind is, in other words, I claim, always a discourse of, and on, moral-existential relations.

Here is a short and rough sketch of the structure of my 'argument'. I set off developing my claims and illustrations by, as it were, deciphering two moral-existential concerns—reminiscent of the discussions in the *Prologue* above—hidden within the naturalist discourse of the 'mystery of the mind'. On the one



hand, I identify a form of self-alienation concealed within the naturalist mind-body problem that centres on an existential concern with the 'truth' of the self, as opposed to the 'immediate' and 'naïve' 'experience' of self. On the other hand, I also identify a different variation of this self-alienation, namely a concern with the inner and its expression in relation to the other. The remainder of the thesis is then my attempt to illustrate and argue how and why this self-alienation, or the inner-outer tension/strife, is best understood as a form of moral-existential displacement, and more specifically, a displacement of desire. Moreover, leaning on my analysis of the concerns that come to expression in the discourse of the mind and its relationship to the body/outer—at least in those discourses I engage with—I diagnose the underlying concern with displacement of desire as, in some constitutive sense, informed by an attempt to *secure* or *guarantee* the other person's desire, a desire that nonetheless cannot be secured or guaranteed because of the very nature of desire.

It might be said that the main claim of the thesis unfolds in a twofold manner. As its basic component, the claim is that the full circle of the structure of desire—as it can be identified in the discourses on mind—is informed by the desire for the other's desire for one's desire for the other. That is, the existential disquietude is internal to the very nature or logic of desire: our fundamental desire for the other's desire (for *us*) lacks the *conditions* for securing or guaranteeing the other's desire. One is, in this sense, fully at the mercy of the other. However, I argue, the rationale of the temptation to *displace* the reality of desire lies exactly in the way in which the dynamics of (social) *affirmation* provides a strategic, although self-deceptive, 'overcoming' of the lack of desirer's hideous uncertainty, or rather, its openness. For the specific character of social affirmation is that acquiring the status of a 'position' in the (symbolic) order of the social gaze, *means* to be affirmed: the social position *is* its own affirmation, and in this sense guarantees the desire of the other. That is, social affirmation (through a position/signifier) *guarantees* the (displaced) desire of the social gaze for its ('irresistible') *object*, although never the desire of one person for another. So, in order to 'overcome' the fundamental uncertainty of desire, one needs only to transmute one's desire for the other's desire to a desire to be affirmed by the social gaze. The cost: instead of oneself *as oneself* receiving the desire of the other *as themselves*, one receives—as *the possessor of a particular position or identity*—the affirmation of the other *as the Other of the gaze of the social-symbolic order*. In short, in order to (phantasmatically) secure or guarantee the desire of the other, one not only separates oneself (one's identity and 'appearance') from oneself, but, simultaneously, also separates others from themselves and construes them on the model of the Other; the affirming gaze. It is then *in and in relation to* this constellation and dynamics, I argue, that the 'body' or the 'outer' of the 'mind-body strife' announces itself as the *object* and instrument of displacement of

desire. 'Body' is disassociated from the soul and its desire or, alternatively, (mis)identified with it, and thus seen as somehow the *cause* of the 'mind-body strife', or, alternatively, seen as that which somehow, necessarily, veils the real of the soul in one's relationship to others.

This brings us to the other, intricately overlapping and intermingling, vein in which the main claim unfolds. As I will try to argue and illustrate, the logic and dynamics of desire inform the very way in which the horizons of understanding and meaning—or rather the horizon of meaning-understanding—constitutes itself in our lives. The thought here is more or less the following. If the basic structure of desire is that one desires the other's desire for one's desire, then desire is a desire for what could be called, open expressiveness. That is, if the other is to desire *my* desire, then my desire must have an expression *and* travel all the way with it. However, for my desire, for my inner or my soul, to travel all the way with expression to the other, for this expression to hit its target, namely the desire of the other, the other must be open to this inner, to my desire; the other must desire my desire. But, as noted, this cannot be commanded or guaranteed. That is, the basic horizon of understanding and meaning *between* individuals hinges on nothing but this openness of desire.

It is, I come to argue, exactly this unescapable 'uncertainty' or openness of the horizon of meaning and understanding that motivates, although does not explain, the (phantasmatic) ideals of the 'unquestionable authority' of either external objective rules/criteria or inner private objects. For by injecting such ideals into the horizon of meaning and understanding, the delusion is produced that meaning and understanding can (ideally) be definitely secured and the hideous openness of desire reduced out of the equation. In other words, the claim here will be that there is a certain essential openness pertaining to meaning and understanding in a double sense. Meaning and understanding, in a very elementary sense, hinges on the openness of desire. However, there is another aspect or dimension to this, namely that internal to the way in which desire informs the horizon of meaning and understanding, there is an openness of our very being as well. There is, I claim, or rather suggest, no clear, overarching, limit to be presented for what things can come to mean to us, for how we might come to respond to each other and to the world in new ways, and how this might inform our desires and consequently our understanding of each other and the world. The conditions of possibility might be something we cannot avoid, but this does not mean that we thus know the (absolute) limits of being. In short, my proposal will be that meaning and understanding, in and through desire, is always and essentially a *search for meaning*.

There is, then, a sense in which I will be claiming that the displacement of desire through the struggle for affirmation—the urge to *secure* the desire of the other, as well as meaning—is the source of the mind-body split or strife.

However, two important reservations need to be added. *First*, my intention will not be to claim that the moral-existential dynamics I investigate is an *exhaustive* account of the 'mind-body strife'. By saying things like the mind-body problem is 'rooted in', or 'the source of the mind-body problem is', I mean to say—throughout the thesis—that the kinds of concerns I suggest we can identify internal to the discourses of mind that I engage with, display the logic and dynamics of a displaced desire to secure the desire of the other. That is, my claim is that the 'logic' of a displaced desire for (social) affirmation, the displaced desire to *secure* the desire of the other, follows the same 'logic' that structures the naturalist mind-body problem, as well as the Cartesian, and the Platonic, mind-body strife. Alternatively, the thesis should *exclusively* be understood as my attempt to open up a perspective on the concerns and questions I find internal to the discourses of mind I engage with, a perspective that helps me (and perhaps you) to make sense of these very concerns. In other words, I do not want to claim that there cannot be any other ways in which a tension can manifest itself between 'mind' and 'body' or the 'inner' and the 'outer' except in terms of a displaced desire for (social) affirmation. Although I would be ready to claim that a tension between the 'mind' and 'body' is inconceivable 'outside' of moral-existential relations—and simply pertaining to 'pure' features of 'reality'—because it is unclear how one could give any sense to the concepts of 'mind' or 'body' independently of these relations. But this is something I do not want to place any substantial weight on in this thesis.

*Secondly*, in claiming to have located a source to the mind-body strife, I do *not* claim to have provided an *explanation* for why it is that we displace our desire, why split ourselves, in the first place. In fact, what I essentially argue for, or try to show, is that there is no explanation to be given here, no way of accounting for why this is how things actually are. Rather, the displacement of desire has, in this sense, the character of Original sin: displacement is the 'first cause' of itself; evil the 'first cause' of evil. Explanations, reasoning, do not, cannot, in other words, provide us with an ('independent') antidote to displacement, to the corruption of the soul, because this would only amount to an externalisation of the very core of the problem, which is, of course, not to say that reasoning plays no role, has no significance, for how we deal with our displacement or self-alienation—as I will try to show. This is, I claim, our radical freedom, and responsibility.

I suggest, then, that the thesis is best read as an essay that begins with a certain idea of the mind-body problem, which is identified as confused and unclear, but out of which a certain general logic and dynamic is distilled. It then moves on to analyse this logic and dynamic and develops a specific perspective on or understanding of it. Perhaps one might say that the 'truth' of the perspective that is opened up lies in the way in which it is able to guide us to a

radically moral-existential horizon *without* losing touch with the general logic and (structural) dynamics of the problem from which the thesis sets out.

Finally, I want to lay further emphasis on what the main claim of this thesis is *not*. Most importantly, I do not take myself to argue *against* the possibility or actuality of a mind-body dualism. In other words, I am not advocating for any monistic conception of the 'mind' as inseparable from the 'body', as reducible to a feature of the 'body', or as nothing but the 'body'. Nor am I—in contrast to some naturalists (cf. Dennett 1991; Metzinger 2003) and, in a different sense, Lacanian theory (e.g. Lacan 1988; 2001c; 2016)—arguing that mind, or self, or the soul, in fact does not *exist*, that it does not 'correspond' to anything 'real'. If anything, I hope not to have advanced any definitive (metaphysical) claims about what 'mind' and 'body' *are*, claims that would, for instance, speak either for or against the immortality of the soul. Rather, the exclusive focus of this thesis is, hopefully, on the moral-existential *tension* or *strife* between 'mind' and 'body', *as this strife or tension and the corresponding concepts of 'mind' and 'body' come to expression in the discourses of the 'mind-body' relations that I discuss*. To put it differently, one might say that my arguments and illustrations amount to the suggestion that whatever *real* unity or difference there might exist between 'mind' (whatever this concept in the end can mean) and 'body' (whatever this concept in the end can mean), cannot as such be the reason for or cause of the moral-existential *tension* or *strife* between 'mind' and 'body', or 'inner' and 'outer'. The very structure of reality does not *cause* any moral-existential dissonance; it is only the soul itself—in its freedom, responsibility, and desire—that is the root of it.

## Structure

I will now provide an outline of the structure of the thesis, which will enable me to sketch out a more comprehensive map of the central themes and issues around which the main claim of the thesis is structured, or through which it unfolds. However, since individual chapters begin with their own introductions, I will here only very roughly and briefly characterise the thesis as a whole.

As already indicated in the *Prologue*, the thesis takes its point of departure in the contemporary, yet by now perhaps somewhat outdated, naturalist philosophy of mind.<sup>6</sup> The reasons underpinning the choice of this particular point of

6 I am quite aware that the kind of naturalism I discuss has become, perhaps, a bit less popular within academic discourse, and has been challenged and partly replaced by a new wave of naturalism usually alluded to as 4E cognition; 'embedded', 'extended', 'embodied', and 'enacted' cognition (Bruin *et. al.* 2018). As for instance Phil Hutchinson (2019) argues in his lucid paper, 4E cognition is perceived as establishing, by attacking "Cartesian representationalism", a new

departure are complex and reach into the depths of my own soul. In some general sense, though, the reasons concern the hegemonic position the naturalistic outlook enjoys in the spirit of our times. While I do not want to deny that the aspiration to formulate a critique of naturalist philosophy of mind has originally been, for me personally, driven by *reactive* motives, I hope that in and throughout this thesis, I have been able to overcome myself in this regard. By this I mean that I hope that the thesis forms, not merely a reactive response, but rather a 'constructive' one that tries to search for the *meaning* of the naturalist outlook and its 'mind-body problem'. To the extent I have succeeded at this, chapter II suggests—after having identified the object of critique—that in grounding the mind-body *problem* in an, allegedly, purely structural, or 'grammatical', asymmetry or incommensurability between the two poles of the dichotomy, naturalist philosophy of mind in fact fails to give sense to any philosophical—conceptual—'problem' about the mind—a 'problem' which it nonetheless sets out to solve or dissolve. Consequently, the task I set for myself is to trace the sense of the senselessness of the naturalist mind-body 'problem', and to try to understand what kind of dynamics underpin the existential self-other-alienation that it gives expression to, *in its confusion*. The preliminary diagnosis in chapter II will be that the naturalist mind-body problem contains a two-folded and interconnected concern, reminiscent of the two last suggestive characterisations shortly developed in the *Prologue* above. That is, my suggestion will be that the naturalist mind-body problem is in fact structured around, on the one hand, a mind-*mind* problem, by which I mean a concern with what it is about ourselves that dislocates us from the 'truth' about ourselves, while, on the other hand, also involving a concern with open expressiveness in the relationship to the other.

In chapter III, which takes its cue from the suggested mind-*mind* problem, I try to argue and illustrate, in some detail, how and why Descartes'—as well as the Augustinian and Baconian—mind-body dualism ought to be understood as

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theoretical paradigm for overcoming the dualist framework that has haunted philosophers since Plato, through Descartes, all the way to the contemporary naturalist mind-body problem, by replacing it with a basically Aristotelian monistic cosmology (Hutchinson 2019, pp. 116-117). Now my motivation for completely ignoring this new trend in (naturalist) philosophy of mind is that I am not interested in overcoming the mind-body problem, or dualism for that matter. Rather, my aim and interest lies in trying to understand the moral-existential concerns that inform these. My take on the matter is that while I do not want to deny any virtues that 4E cognition might contribute with, the immanent risk, as far as I can see, is nevertheless that by substituting a 'dualist' framework for a 'monistic' one, one loses sight of the moral-existential concerns informing dualism, and perhaps hides/displaces these concerns even more deeper within a monistic framework, than if one attempted to understand the dynamics that comes to expression in a dualist framework. I hope that by the end of the thesis the reader will have a somewhat clearer understanding of what I mean by this.

essentially concerned with a "strife" between mind/soul and body, thus uniting, in a certain sense, epistemology with some sort of moral-existential disquietude. More precisely, I suggest that the Cartesian (as well as the Augustinian and Baconian) epistemological outlook, and consequently the "strife" or disquietude internal to the mind-body distinction, is one centred on the "misuse of the free will" (Descartes 1967a, p. 177). In other words, I identify Descartes' mind-body dualism (and his overall epistemological outlook) as expressive of a moral-existential mind-*mind* problem or challenge. The obvious reason, then, for turning to Descartes' mind-body dualism is that while contemporary naturalists quite explicitly and self-consciously see themselves as engaging with and combating Descartes' dualism—which thus forms the very conceptual horizon and bedrock of naturalist philosophy of mind—their reading of Descartes is nevertheless poor, resulting in an unfortunate detachment from the moral-existential dimensions of Descartes' philosophy and, consequently, their own mind-body 'problem'. Put differently, the primary reason for invoking Descartes is that it helps me trace (a bit further) the *sense* of the moral-existential concerns I claim to have identified in the naturalist mind-body problem.

Chapter IV forms an extensive reflection on Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*. The suggestion is that the *Gorgias* ties together the different themes and concerns that have so far emerged in relation to the mind-body strife and helps clarify issues that remains obscure in Descartes' philosophy, and, consequently, in contemporary naturalist philosophy of mind. One of the central thoughts I develop in chapter IV is that we can see in Plato more clearly than in Descartes, the, what I call 'grammatical<sup>7</sup> ties' between the good, the rational, and the will, and that this sheds light on how to understand the problem, or rather displacement, of the will. My argument, in a nutshell, is that the will ought to be understood as internal to the discourse of reason, meaning that the will is tied to the good in that the production of rational justification *is* (grammatically) giving good reasons for one's deeds and words. However, as I will argue, in Plato we can see how this grammatical tie between the good, the rational, and the will is, also and essentially, a moral-existential tie, one that in the end answers to our desire for each other; a desire for the 'nakedness'—alternatively, 'openness'—*between* souls. The truth, goodness, and will of the soul is *in* the naked openness

7 I will use the term 'grammatical' throughout the thesis as referring to the ways in which concepts are tied to each other. My understanding of what this tie *is*, is something that will be developed throughout the thesis, and will surface more clearly by and by. My usage of the term 'grammatical' is primarily inspired by Wittgenstein's writings, especially his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), and Wittgenstein scholarship (see e.g. Wallgren 2006). Wittgenstein somewhat enigmatically puts forth the suggestion that "*Essence* is expressed by grammar" (Wittgenstein 1953, § 371, p. 116e). I will not develop any explicit accounts of what Wittgenstein thought this to mean, but I hope that the reader will have some idea at the end of the thesis about how I tend to understand it.

*between* souls. This 'truth of the soul' can, I claim, be traced in Plato's *Gorgias* through an analysis of the way in which Plato identifies the core of his interlocutors' displacement of desire or will, and consequently their irrationality. That is, in *Gorgias* it is Socrates' interlocutors' "love for the people", their struggle to gain social affirmation, which marks the core of their souls' dissonance. And, it is in this setting that the 'body' enters the problematic—the displacement of desire—by announcing itself as the object of the social gaze, providing the individual with an instrument for displacing desire in the search for affirmation through social positioning. Moreover, it is in Plato's *Gorgias* that I, then, identify a clear point of intersection between the two moral-existential concerns identified as informing the naturalist mind-body problem, namely the mind-*mind* problem *and* the concern with the inner and its expression in the relationship to the other.

However, chapter IV does not in any direct sense constitute a unified, linear, argument. Rather, it might be portrayed as a mapping of the constellation of concerns and themes that interplay in the mind-body strife. Nor does it constitute a simple celebration of Plato, as I also attempt to present a reading of *Gorgias* that suggests that the Platonic notion of the soul, reason, the good, and the will, is in fact underpinned by and structured around *ressentiment*. Nonetheless, I do end up defending Plato in the sense that I present how the resentment-suggesting elements *can* be read as *not* underpinned by resentment, but rather as revolving around the force of conscience.

Moreover, I end the chapter by trying to illustrate how the relationship between the good and reason, that is, the question of the *meaning* of our will and the naked openness between souls is, and in a sense always remains, something that cannot as such, exhaustively, be determine or define. The *search* for meaning is and remains part and parcel of the very *meaning* of the naked openness and desire *between* individuals and their shared lives.

Chapter V continues directly from where the preceding chapter ends, and even more strongly takes the form of a non-linear engagement, continuously revisiting themes and questions anew. Once one trail comes to a certain point (although not an endpoint), it is traced anew but from a slightly different angle, and with overlaps rather than always symmetrically in parallel. Less stylistically or methodologically put, chapter V shifts the focus of the investigation more centrally towards the question of *meaning*. One of the main themes and claims is that, what I will identify as the Augustinian-Cartesian picture of the soul and meaning only manages to uncover the 'pure form' of the symptomatic displacement that it seeks to remedy, but without acknowledging it in these terms and instead suggesting that this 'pure form' of the displacement *is* the metaphysical truth or meaning of the soul. Following this identification I then try to show, through revisiting the discussion in chapter IV, how we can read

Plato as proposing a quite radically different picture of reason and/or philosophy as the antidote to irrationality and the dissonance of the soul, from what we find in the Augustinian-Cartesian tradition. Namely, instead of turning towards mind itself (into solitary and 'internal' meditation), as both Augustine and Descartes proposes, I suggest that Plato suggests that philosophy (the 'rational discipline' of the soul) ought to be conceived as an open or naked turning towards another *person*. This latter turning, I propose, is simultaneously a turning towards the 'real of our desire', and a turning towards the *Ur*-scene of meaning. Importantly, what I claim is then not only that we can find in Plato a quite different conception of philosophy, reason, discipline, meaning, etc. For what I suggest, perhaps quintessentially, is that we can find a challenge to how to think about what it is to think about the truth or the real of the soul. In short, what we find in Plato, I argue, is not a conception of a 'healthy soul' in terms of an achieved endpoint or substance (which Descartes and Augustine arguably do), but rather a conception of the healthy soul as one that openly, and indefinitely, searches for meaning *as it comes to manifest itself in the shared life, in the cycle of desire, between souls*.

Much of the argumentation in chapter V takes place in dialogue or, dare I say, in collaboration with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953; henceforth *Investigations*); a 'collaboration' that gives further weight to the notion that the *Ur*-scene of meaning and the real of our desire is tied to open expressiveness between individuals. This collaboration, together with my collaboration with the *Gorgias* dialogue, also forms the backbone of my critical engagement with Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity, which I deal with at the end of the chapter. As those acquainted with Lacan's thinking will notice throughout the thesis, the way I frame much of the discourse on the 'mind-body problem' either (in some cases) simply happens to 'fit' the Lacanian discourse, or (in other cases) is to some extent inspired by this discourse. In other words, there are, to my mind at least, deep similarities between the concerns and issues I identify as central to the discourse of mind and those developed by Lacan(ians). Nevertheless, the case I try to advance is, on a basic level, the exact opposite of what Lacan(ians) seem to profess. Namely, and as far as I can see, whereas Lacan(ians) tend to explain the split and tension of human subjectivity in terms of, as constituted by, rooted in, an incommensurable or paradoxical trait in (the structure of) reality itself, I hold that the tension and split of the self can only be captured in moral-existential terms.

The thesis then ends with a short *Epilogue*. The *Epilogue* is perhaps best read as marking the distance travelled from the beginning of the thesis to the end of it; a distance not in terms of the philosophical question or problem, but rather a distance in the understanding of the *meaning* of it. Alternatively, it marks the distance one is able to travel from the naturalist mind-body problem to a



radically moral-existential understanding of the inner-outer split *without* losing touch with the general logic and structural dynamics internal to the naturalist mind-body problem. Or, this is at least what I suggest.

### Style/Method

I do not think any particular, let alone unified, method or methodology characterises this thesis. If there is one, then it has not been the result of any conscious effort, and could be identified by me only in retrospect. Obviously, thinking and writing always has a from, and so in this descriptive sense one might surely find many particular 'methodologies' in the pages that follow. However, framing this work in terms of methodology seems quite irrelevant, at least to me. Perhaps it is more to the point to say that the thesis has a certain essayistic style to it. What I mean is that the thesis is, perhaps, best described as an effort or attempt to work with and partly through certain concerns and issues. However, I cannot say that I have thought much about style. And this, I think, also shows—in many respects, undoubtedly, as a lack. One might, again perhaps, say that this thesis comprises an attempt to present—although it surely has more the character of a re-presentation—the thinking that has gone into this work. This is why the reader will find a certain repetitive movement going on: questions and themes are worked with and partly through to a certain point, only to re-emerge, in a somewhat altered form, from another perspective, another point of departure and, as noted above, not in a parallel fashion but rather in terms of overlaps. In other words, a certain lack of 'systematic' rigour characterises the work as a whole.

It must, however, be admitted that the reference to the lack of systematic rigour has an apologetic dimension too. For what the reader has before themselves is, undoubtedly, a *raw* work, despite that it has taken me quite many years to finalise this thesis. Although part of the reason for this lies in that I have been working, parallelly, with the philosophy of technology, there is a more substantial reason to it as well. Namely, what I began noticing quite early on was that the way my thoughts and ideas kept on developing throughout the process of writing always resulted in a self-critical stance towards the very way that I had framed the questions, problems, and 'conclusions'. The problems and/or deadlocks lay in the very way I had entered into the discussion. So, after having written one or two chapters I usually took time off to think about the next one—and other things I was working on—only to find that when I had gotten a clearer picture of what I was to write next, the things I had written earlier began to look more and more problematic, up till the point that I simply

had to start all over again, partly also rethinking the whole structure anew. This spiralling went on for some while, until, well, really for practical reasons, the thesis simply had to be finalised. This has meant that I have had to write the whole thing in a quite hasty pace, not only because of the deadline set by practical and institutional reasons, but also in order to resist or stop the circular movement of thought/writing. That is, in order not to once more end up at the beginning rather than the conclusion. —Although I frame this in apologetic terms, I think that there is, however, a sense in which it lies in the very nature of philosophy that its 'conclusions' will always be beginnings, for reasons which I think this thesis to some extent illustrates. So again, what you have before you is a 'raw' work (which all my/philosophical works are destined to remain), polished under, not only practical and institutional constraints, but more substantially, existential ones.

### **Some General Remarks**

An issue that is closely tied to what I said just now, concerns my engagement with the different thinkers/works I invoke and 'utilise'. As the reader will notice, throughout the thesis I do not rely very much on secondary literature, with only the part on Lacan forming a bit of an exception in this respect. Instead, the main philosophical characters of the thesis enter only through close readings of their original texts. While this approach has its obvious risks and potential shortcomings, let me say some things about how each of the thinkers are brought into the discussion.

My treatment of naturalist philosophy of mind is certainly limited and sketchy. However, as I try to make clear, my concern with naturalist philosophy of mind is not at all with the proposed 'solutions' to the mind-body problem, but rather with how the very framework of the problem is understood; what the framework of the problem is. With respect to this limited and basic task, I do not think I have misrepresented the naturalist project, taking into consideration that I limit my usage of 'the naturalist mind-body problem' only to those thinkers I discuss. Moreover, the analysis and diagnosis I present in relation to the naturalist mind-body problem is one that tries to stay true to the naturalists' claims themselves. Whether I have succeeded in this or not, is something that the reader must assess critically.

Although my reading of Descartes mostly builds on close readings of his own writings, it is also to some extent influenced and/or informed by some authors in the secondary literature—although I cannot say my reading fits theirs in any direct and uniform sense. Some of the central influences have been the

works of Lilli Alanen (2003), John Cottingham (2008), and Stephen Menn (2002). I do not claim any expertise on the subject matter of Descartes' philosophy. However, I feel quite confident that I have not misrepresented Descartes in any substantial sense, although I have sometimes expanded Descartes' own ideas and claims in a direction that I feel they intellectually allow for, and have also pointed out problems and inconstancies (or displacements) in his thinking. This does not mean that I have managed to capture the essence or complexity of his philosophical system. As I said, I do not claim to be an expert on Descartes. There is then a sense in which my engagement with Descartes is a mixture of serious textual interpretation and a utilisation of his texts for my own purposes. I have, in other words, invoked Descartes (and in relation to him Bacon and Augustine as well) in order to show how one can, by attempting to stay true to his writings, identify important features of the moral-existential dynamics of the mind-body strife that I suggest inform the naturalist characterisation of the 'mind-body problem', features that, as I try to show, are also to be found in all of the other thinkers I engage with.

The case of Plato is both more difficult and, simultaneously, in a sense more straightforward. It is the latter to the extent that my engagement with Plato is limited to the *Gorgias*. More specifically, the reading of *Gorgias* that I present is limited to an attempt to understand what sense a reader of this dialogue can, on strictly text-immanent grounds, give to the strife between (the rational) soul and body without leaning on any further engagement with the works of Plato or Plato scholarship. Consequently, I am not making any other claims about Plato and I leave open the question whether my reading of *Gorgias* can shed light on Plato's philosophy more broadly. However, while it is true that I utilise *Gorgias* for my own purposes—and this should be kept in mind—this means that I do it, can do it, exactly because I think that the themes and issues *are* there in the text—and that I can show this—and because I think they are there in ways that bring together a variety of the different issues and dimensions that are intertwined with the concerns underpinning the mind/soul-body split or strife, as I come to identify them throughout the thesis.<sup>8</sup>

The critical question here is of course to what extent it is possible to 'understand the meaning' of *Gorgias* without taking into account Plato's philosophy more generally, and, consequently, the massive secondary literature on it. That is, am I bound to simply produce my own fiction of what is there in the *Gorgias* if I do not consult the experts? Perhaps. And to the extent this is so,

8 There is, then, a claim to be found here that the perspective my reading of *Gorgias* opens up with respect to the mind-body question has not been, at least to my knowledge, acknowledged before. So, as I take my reading to be able to make sense of many issues in the dialogue, I am, then, indirectly suggesting that my reading might function as a fruitful perspective for anyone interested in understanding Plato.

I cannot but concede the accusation and simply urge the reader to take what is advanced in chapters IV and V as my own narration. Nevertheless, even if this were the case I would urge the reader to consider what relevance what I say with reference to Plato might have for our understanding of the mind-body, or inner-outer, relationship and tension. I should of course also point out that I am not, in fact, completely uninformed about or by different discourses on and interpretations of Plato's works. Most notably, my reading and approach to the *Gorgias* is influenced by Gregory Vlastos' (1991; 1994) writings on Socratic philosophy and its relationship to Plato, but even more importantly by Thomas Wallgren's (2006) discussion of the same. With this in mind, it might be said that the philosophy and notions I find in *Gorgias* fit the character of Socrates better than that of Plato. That is, for both Vlastos and Wallgren there lies a fundamental difference between Socrates and Plato. Namely, while Socrates did not—according to this interpretation—advance any claims to higher or indubitable knowledge, and consequently did not aspire to a foundationalist project but rather thought the practice of philosophy and the advancement of knowledge or understanding to be limited simply to what can be achieved through dialogical exchange<sup>9</sup>, Plato, influenced by amongst others Pythagorean idealisation of mathematics/geometry, came to believe that knowledge can be founded on indubitable grounds, on a direct acquaintance with the ideas themselves—as (so it is usually taken) exemplified in, for instance, the allegory of the cave. I cannot really say to what extent this distinction holds, as such a judgement definitely falls outside the scope of my competence.<sup>10</sup> What I might nevertheless add is that while Vlastos places the *Gorgias* dialogue as an exemplar of Plato's transition from his earlier Socratic period to his middle metaphysical-idealist-foundationalist period, my reading suggests that *Gorgias* can, and should, be read as not departing from the 'Socratic' conception of philosophy. That is, the arguments, suggestions, and illustrations, that I advance in chapters IV and V largely centre on the idea that *meaning* is only to be found in the openness between individuals 'examining each other' (i.e. 'Socratic philosophy'), and not in any form of 'higher' knowledge. Or, alternatively, whatever *meaning* higher knowledge might and can have, is something that can be found out only in an open, sincere, discursive examination of the soul *with* the other.

9 On this point Wallgren parts from Vlastos' (1991; 1994) and Benson's (2000) interpretation and develops his own account that, instead of advancing a competence to articulate truths/definitions, Socratic wisdom is quintessentially aimed at advancing our moral competence (see Wallgren 2006, pp. 54-61)

10 There are those that challenge Vlastos' (1991) claim that the Platonic dialogues can be divided into an early Socratic period, followed by a middle and late period, where Plato moves from a Socratic conception of philosophy and truth to his own 'Platonic', and foundationalist, version of the same. For critical takes on such a divide, see Gerson (2013; 2014).

My engagement with Wittgenstein is perhaps the least systematic of all and limits itself to a selection of remarks from his *Philosophical Investigations*. I am quite aware of how problematic such utilisation of a selection of remarks can be, and how it is perceived as such amongst 'Wittgenstein experts'. I do not want to defend myself here. While I personally might be of the opinion that the way I invoke Wittgenstein—the kinds of issues I see his *Investigations* addressing—and the way I allow myself to, as I said, 'collaborate' with his text, is based on quite solid ground<sup>11</sup>, I have not made any effort to warrant such an opinion over and above the actual way in which I have presented and made use of passages from the *Investigations*. In short, I do not want to claim that Wittgenstein plays any role in this thesis over and above being my 'instrument'.

This then brings us to my 'Lacan reading'. Once again, I want to start by announcing that I am not an expert on Lacan or on Lacanian thought/discourse. It can, however, be said that my knowledge of Lacan's thought is in fact a bit wider than might appear in this thesis. That is, because I invoke Lacan in a quite targeted fashion, there are a variety of themes central to Lacan's 'theory' that are not at all discussed or even mentioned, but that nevertheless do inform the way in which I place Lacan into the discussion of this thesis, as I hope at least those knowledgeable in Lacan's thinking can notice. More than in the case of the previous thinkers alluded to above, my reading of Lacan is a bit more informed by secondary literature. Most notably, I have been helped by the writings of Paul Verhaeghe (2002; 2009), David Fryer (2004), Lorenzo Chiesa (2016), and Slavoj Žižek (1991; 1997; 2019) and Alenka Zupančič (2017). In terms of Lacan's own writings and seminars, I have made use of a variety of works, although I think that I am mostly influenced by his late Seminar *Sinthome* (Lacan 2016).

All in all, at the centre of this thesis stands a theme, which I identify with the terms 'mind-body', or 'inner-outer', and 'split' and 'tension', more than any particular philosopher or school of thought. Again, my main ambition is to open up a perspective on this theme that can help us to better comprehend the kind of concerns that inform much of the discussion of the mind-body problem. Conversely, then, the apologetic statements above ought just as much be understood as an invitation to see to what extent the perspective I introduce alters and perhaps clarifies those thinkers and texts that are discussed.

11 Since the beginning of my doctoral studies I have been working quite much with Wittgenstein's philosophy, including attending several Wittgenstein related conferences and workshops. It might be said that my reading of Wittgenstein has been closely informed by Perter Hacker's extensive work (Hacker 1990; 1997)—which I nonetheless in many ways part ways with (as will become evident)—Gordon Baker's 'later work' (Baker & Morris 2004), Stephan Mulhall (2007), Richard Eldridge (1997), and Stanley Cavell (1999). However, all of these influences have taken shape against the background of what I have learned from Thomas Wallgren (2006; 2012; 2015), Hannes Nykänen (a; b), and Joel Backström (2011; 2017).

## A Necessary Acknowledgement

On the web page of the University of Helsinki—my home university—one can find the following statement: “A doctoral dissertation is the product of extensive research and presents an original contribution to knowledge in a given field.” If this is the definition of a doctoral dissertation, I am not completely comfortable calling the work at hand by this term. Overlooking the, to my mind, problematic choice of using the term ‘knowledge’ to define the importance and goal of all academic research, I am at least as uncomfortable with what is and can be meant by “original contribution”. This is not simply a case of ‘the philosopher’ being over meticulous about everything—or is it? It is a question about the *purpose* of intellectual activity, and, perhaps, philosophy in particular. Does “original contribution” mean the production of something ‘new’, hence implying that philosophy, academic research more generally, is always about accumulating ‘new’ knowledge? But why would it be important, exclusively important, to come with ‘new’ knowledge; has not especially philosophy, at least since Plato, tended to relate to the subject of knowledge as something to be remembered, acknowledged, rather than as a discovery of new information—although, admittedly, our current *Zeitgeist* predominantly seems to think of ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’ as information and know-*how*. Perhaps, hopefully, the university is thinking here more in terms of a ‘novel’ contribution, in the sense of an interesting and/or unusual approach or angle on a subject matter. Or, perhaps, hopefully, the idea behind “original contribution” is basically meant to refer to a contribution that stems from the contributor's own thinking—that the contributor has, as the motto of the Enlightenment has it, ‘learned to think for oneself’ (Kant 1949; Toivakainen 2017). In this sense, a dissertation would be “original” regardless of whether or not what is said is ‘new’, in that the person of the writer is part and parcel of how the dissertation speaks. If *this* is the case, then I do not hesitate to call this work a doctoral dissertation.

I do not think that I have said anything ‘new’ in these pages. Or, perhaps I have, but this is not evident to me and I would have to think about it a bit more. What I have done, I believe, is to say some things in a new way and in new contexts; connected discourses and ideas in a way that I have not, at least myself, stumbled upon earlier. This is, obviously, something that is bound to happen to the extent that one works through ideas and discourses in one’s own thinking, in one’s own soul, so that its particular concerns become part and parcel of the way things are said. Still, I do feel I have not, most probably, said anything ‘new’ in the sense of bringing into light a conception or idea that previously has not been introduced. However, those thinkers whose thoughts and ideas have been so crucial for nurturing and forming my own thinking, are conspicuous through their (explicit) absence in the text. The reason for this is, at least partly, exactly

the encompassing influence these persons/thinkers have had on me; I simply would not think (philosophically—perhaps an irrelevant qualification!) the way I do if not for these persons. Moreover—and this is a further reason why the fundamental influences are not systematically presented in this thesis—it is not primarily through their writings that I have been influenced by these thinkers, but rather through personal engagements; discussions and co-work that has been going on for more or less as long as I have been working on this thesis, namely some eleven years. This is why I want to devote a few paragraphs to explicating an acknowledgement that, really, should have been there more explicitly throughout the text.

Thomas Wallgren was my teacher during my studies, and it was his novel and passionate work—that cumulated in and continues onwards from his *Transformative Philosophy* (Wallgren 2006)—on the philosophy of philosophy, especially through his reading of Socrates and Wittgenstein, became importantly formative for my (philosophical) thinking. Wallgren introduced to me an understanding of philosophy, and of life, that I was longing for. Although one cannot see any, or very few, *explicit* traces of it in this thesis, my engagement with Wittgenstein is to a large extent influenced by Wallgren, and the innumerable discussions we have had on and around Wittgenstein's philosophy. Moreover, as was already indicated, my reading of Plato's *Gorgias* is deeply indebted to what I have learned from Wallgren about Socratic philosophy. Put together, one of the most important things, especially with regard to the thesis at hand, has been the way Wallgren has helped me to see ways in which reason and ethics or morality form an inseparable whole. Put differently, he has helped me to see that in order for us to stay true to the meaning of 'reason' or 'rationality', we must allow for it to be placed as answering to, or as essentially tied to, our moral-existential concerns, commitments, desires. This insight is no small part of my thesis and informs basically everything that I develop in it.

At the very origin of my doctoral studies, I became acquainted with Hannes Nykänen and Joel Backström, whom I had not stumbled upon earlier. Fortunately, this acquaintance grew into a quite intensive engagement, partly thanks to the Academy of Finland who were brave enough to grant the four of us—i.e. Wallgren, Nykänen, Backström, and myself—money for a four-year research project called 'A Science of the Soul?'—or as we came to call it ASS. Already from the very beginning I realised that both Nykänen and Backström—in their respective ways and through their own personalities—had developed a way of thinking about 'reality', the 'soul', and about philosophy, which I had not encountered before, and which I immediately recognised that I was missing—a feeling reminiscent of my earlier encounter with Wallgren. In short, I found myself, from the very beginning of my doctoral studies, in a more inspiring and fruitful situation than I could have hoped for.

One of the central claims developed in my thesis is that, what I sometimes call the 'real of the soul', or 'the real of desire', or 'the real of the relationship', is something that exists, has its meaning, in-between souls, and, more precisely, that the soul—its desire, understanding, and meaning—is in a constitutive way rooted in an openness between souls. This is, however, not in any way my original idea, but rather something I have learned from both Nykänen and Backström<sup>12</sup>, although there are ways in which my understanding of it departs from their respective conceptions. Likewise, my claim that the tendency in philosophy/thinking to understand 'problems' (the mind-body problem in particular) as rooted in amoral or neutral features of the structure of reality is a way of masking or repressing the actual moral-existential concerns that underpin our displacements, is something both Nykänen and Backström have been arguing for some while now. Moreover, as the reader will come to notice, I use the concept of desire—to the extent it can be said to be a concept—quite frequently and in decisive contexts. Now although one can also find in the Lacanian discourse the claim that desire is always desire for the other's desire, my usage of 'desire' is directly inspired by Nykänen's and Backström's usage, namely as something that has its home in the openness between individuals; between an "I" and a "you" (cf. Nykänen 2002; Backström 2007). In short, as in the case of Wallgren's influence, both Nykänen's and Backström's influence upon my thinking informs basically everything that I develop in this thesis.

Although not officially part of our ASS-gang (i.e. our research project), Fredrik Westerlund has figured as an essential 'intellectual resource' and friend throughout my doctoral studies. The numerous discussions I have had with him—alone and together with the ASS-gang—has proven to be of the utmost significance to me and irreplaceably formative for my thinking and stance towards life. Most notably, I want to point out that my usage of the very central notion in this thesis, namely the search for (social) affirmation, while also inspired by Nykänen and Backström, is something I have learned from, in a way taken from, Westerlund (cf. Westerlund 2019a; 2019b).

<sup>12</sup> Of course, Nykänen (2002) and later Backström (2007) are not the first to develop such thoughts. Although I claim to find this 'truth' underpinning the main thrust of *Gorgias*, and although there are certainly examples of this throughout the history of philosophy, in more recent times thinkers such as Martin Buber (1983), Emmanuel Lévinas (1969), and K. E. Løgstrup (1997) have articulated perspectives on the soul that lie quite close to how Nykänen and Backström understand the issue. Nevertheless, I think that it is clear that Nykänen and Backström, in their respective ways, have developed novel and critical extensions of this perspective, amongst other things, with regards to their analysis of the problems with collectivity (cf. Backström & Nykänen 2014) and their elaborations on the meaning of openness/love (Backström 2007; Nykänen 2002; 2009). It must also be pointed out that it was Nykänen who first began developing these thoughts on his own and later influenced and inspired Backström.



In a sense, it feels somewhat reductive to try to pinpoint specific issues and ideas that I have learned from the above mentioned persons, when it might just as well be said that they are part and parcel of my whole way of thinking. Nevertheless, may the above function as a reminder to the reader wherefrom a large part of my thoughts spring, and may the reader keep in mind that I could just as well have placed a footnote more or less in every paragraph of the thesis saying things like 'this thought is inspired by one of my multiple discussions with Wallgren, Nykänen, Backström, and Westerlund'. —For the most part, I think I would not even be in a position to clearly differentiate which point I have learned from whom and from which discussion. Moreover, I also want to emphasise that when I say that I have learned things from the people mentioned here, this neither means that we share the exact same outlook, nor that I have fully comprehended whatever I take to have learned from them, and thus might misrepresent their points. All in all, I want to encourage the reader to read their works and discover the depth and comprehensiveness of their thoughts, which this thesis may or may not lack.

## II

### *In Search of the Naturalist Mind-Body Problem*

#### **Introduction: Why Naturalism, What Kind of Naturalism?**

As noted several times already, in attempting to trace and locate the dynamics and sources of our worry with, and differentiation between, mind and body or the inner and the outer, this thesis takes as its point of departure what I will call contemporary naturalist philosophy of mind and its 'mind-body problem'. But why depart from here, and what is this naturalism, what kind of naturalism is it, that sends us off? Perhaps one of the most pressing reasons for departing from naturalism or naturalist philosophy of mind is its dominating presence in contemporary discourse on the life of the mind and the 'mind's' relation to the 'body' (or brain) and 'the world'. This makes naturalist discourse, frankly speaking, quite hard to avoid. The terms 'naturalist' or 'naturalism' are, nevertheless, somewhat ambiguous and used in a variety of different ways in philosophy and science more broadly speaking. This is why I have reserved *my* use of the term to a quite specific and narrow sense, which I will explicate below. However, although I will not attempt to differentiate my usages of the term 'naturalism' from other usages of it in detail, I want to make a few short comments on the issue here and now.

"On the broadest understanding of naturalism," Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen writes, "the term simply stands for the opposition to 'supernatural' entities, and in this sense, most philosophers today are naturalists." (Søndergaard Christensen 2019, p179). However unclear the reasons might be for why an opposition to "supernatural entities" manages to unite, so broadly, philosophy and philosophers, I gather that most of us will recognise this statement as spelling out a certain truth about our times and culture, regardless of whether or not we happen to identify with this *Zeitgeist*. Further, Søndergaard Christensen goes on to identify this broad conception of naturalism as dividing into two central schools of thought, namely "scientific" and "relaxed" naturalism. Scientific naturalism, she explains, is characterised "by an ontological commitment to 'an exclusively scientific conception of nature' or by a methodological commitment to the idea that 'philosophical inquiry is conceived as continuous with science'." (Ibid.) Relaxed naturalism, on the other hand, objects to the idea that science could "account for what is real and what is not

real, because the answer to this question hinges on conceptual and rational resources available only from the perspective of the experiencing subject.” (Ibid., p. 181) Instead, Søndergaard Christensen continues, thinkers such as John McDowell (1996; 1998) have argued that while “our rational and normatively informed understanding of the world, placed in what [McDowell] labels ‘the space of reason’, always already has a footing in raw nature”, this “space of reason” can nevertheless only be captured through the “concept of second nature, which is meant to capture how human beings, through their upbringing, education, and initiation into a certain culture, develop their natural potential, their first nature, into something that involves completely new rational and linguistic abilities.” (Ibid., p. 181) In short, mind, the space of reason, values, meaning, etc., are all, allegedly, ‘natural’ in the sense that they do not originate from “supernatural entities” but rather have their footing in “raw nature” and thus simply expand nature rather than, as it were, break with it.

It seems to me that the way I will use the term ‘naturalism’, or ‘naturalist philosophy of mind’, or the naturalist ‘mind-body problem’, does not directly correlate with what Søndergaard Christensen identifies as scientific naturalism. It could, however, be said to do so in the sense that I use the term naturalism more or less exclusively as bound to, and internal to, what is called the ‘mind-body problem’. That is, while I believe that some of the thinkers I include as naturalists would not identify themselves in a direct manner to any scientifically exclusive methodologies or ontologies, they nevertheless do identify the ‘mind-body problem’ as one pertaining to an asymmetry or differentiation between, on the one hand, mind and, on the other hand, the world *as informed by natural science (or rather the scientific worldview)*—although some of them do not think there is a scientific ‘answer’ to the ‘problem’ (the more detailed reasons for this will become clear as the chapter proceeds). Nevertheless, although my usage of the term naturalism will be closest to what Søndergaard Christensen identifies as scientific naturalism, I want to point out, with a few short comments, in what sense the whole of this book can, and arguably ought, to be read as shedding critical light on all of the three forms of naturalism identified by Søndergaard Christensen, namely “scientific”, “relaxed”, and “broad” or “the broadest understanding of” naturalism.

Something closely resembling scientific naturalism, as identified above, will form my main target. However, it will not be a target only in the sense of an object of critique, but more importantly, in the sense of diagnosing and trying to understand the concerns and worries, the motivational drives, informing the mind-body ‘problem’, as this form of naturalism conceives of it. My diagnosis, as will become evident, shares *some* elements with McDowell’s ‘relaxed naturalism’. Centrally it shares his suggestion (which of course is not originally his idea) that scientific thought and theory—with which scientists investigate the ‘structure and truth of the world’—cannot be detached from the mind or thought/thinking

itself. Scientific thought and its 'truths' are, as it were, always already within the "space of reason" (mind) and cannot thus explain it 'from the outside', 'neutrally'. However, while these thoughts lead McDowell to develop conceptual tools ("second nature") in order to 'dissolve' the mind-body problem<sup>13</sup>, while at the same time 'saving us' from "supernatural entities" like those found for instance in Descartes' substance dualism, I see the naturalist mind-body problem (and its forerunners) not as a pseudo-problem—as McDowell arguably does—but rather as a kind of para-problem, in the sense of being *beside* the real or actual concern; expressing it, yet in some sense in a distorted fashion. In other words, as I will attempt to show, I do not think we ought to 'get rid' of the mind-body problem. Rather, my aspiration is to try to understand it, which I suggest in some central sense demands understanding the moral-existential dynamics that informs the very significance and place of the 'problem' in our (intellectual) lives. By doing so, I believe we will come to recognise and appreciate how the mind-body problem gives expression to—although in a distorted fashion—some very deep and constitutional issues concerning human life; issues, I think, we ought definitely not to dissolve in McDowell's sense, but rather attempt to clarify/understand. The immanent risk—actually, I would claim, the immanent consequence—of attempting to 'get rid' of the mind-body problem, is that the moral-existential concerns that inform and/or are expressed in the mind-body problem, relocate themselves in a new guise. In other words, my suggestion will be that the moral-existential concerns internal to the mind-body problem do not call for conceptual innovations and solutions or dissolvments. Instead, what is called for is, perhaps, better conceived of in terms of a 'facing up' to these challenges, as it were, *on their own terms, as themselves*. Or, so I will suggest and attempt to articulate what it could mean.

This brings me to the sense in which my analysis and re-workings of the naturalist mind-body problem also casts a critical light on the claims or commitments of broad naturalism. For, I believe, if we gain better insight into the nature of the moral-existential dynamics internal to the mind-body problem, we will also have resources to better appreciate the sense and function of the 'supernatural' and the way in which it distinguishes itself from 'the natural' or 'nature'. The critical light cast by this upon the broad sense of naturalism—to which a great deal of philosophers nowadays seem to be committed—does not, then, derive from a belief in supernatural entities—although I might believe in the supernatural—or from a belief that all is *not* nature—although, again, I might believe this. Rather, the point is that the better we understand the moral-existential concerns and its dynamics that inform the differentiation between the supernatural and the natural, the less reason we have to disregard the one in

13 For a lucid account, and critique, of McDowell's 'conceptual innovations' and his 'dissolvment' of the mind-body problem see Wallgren (2019)

favour of the other. Having said this, I am not denying that the idea of the 'supernatural' has been utilised in a variety of corrupt and destructive ways, and that one can, in this respect, *sympathise* with efforts of 'overcoming' the supernatural. However, I cannot see how the term 'nature' or 'natural' would provide us with a cosmological notion more immune to corruption and misuse than 'supernatural'; do we not have evidence of how destructive ideological commitments to 'nature' or the 'natural' can be!? Again, I am not saying that the notion of supernatural is innocent and good in itself. What I am saying is that the broad sense of naturalism seems to immanently be vulnerable to the risk of failing to see the way in which, so I will argue, the supernatural, as a contrast to nature, ought to be understood as a moral concept, and the way in which it struggles to capture a deep worry and concern internal to the life of the soul/mind. To repeat then, while what I just now said applies generally throughout the thesis, the reader ought to keep in mind that my explicit or direct usage of the term 'naturalism' or 'naturalist philosophy of mind', or 'naturalist mind-body problem', is meant to refer only to the way in which I, here below, identify a common problem that unites certain thinkers within the broad scope of naturalism.

Let me then end this introduction by giving a brief outline of the chapter at hand. I begin my identification of the naturalist mind-body problem by drawing attention to how this specific form of naturalism is internally divided. In other words, I will begin by depicting what unites the type of naturalism (and its mind-body problem) that I will explicitly discuss, by focusing precisely on its internal divergences and disagreements. Proceeding from differences and disagreements, I then turn the focus more explicitly on a discussion of what it is that unites the field of naturalism I invoke. The explication of what unites the naturalists will, in turn, provide new explications of what differentiates them.

In my depiction of the shared framework of the naturalist mind-body problem I will suggest, and argue for, that we can identify two different levels intertwined within the naturalist problem/question of how to fit the mind *in* 'the world'. On one level, the problem is concerned with what Colin McGinn (1991) dubs "existential naturalism", which expands beyond Søndergaard Christensen's definition of broad naturalism into the field of what she identified as scientific naturalism. In what will be identified here as "existential naturalism", the central claim is that mind is a 'natural *biological* phenomenon'. As I will try to show, while the naturalists think that the metaphysical mind-body problem is in fact—or is more or less well established as—a mind-brain *interaction* problem, I argue that what can warrant the transition from a classical/metaphysical mind-body problem, or mind-body strife, to the contemporary mind-*brain* problem is only, and exclusively, a *commitment* to the kind of naturalism that is advocated—the ends justify the means; or is it not, rather, the means that justify the end!? Furthermore, on another level, I try to show that even the mind-brain problem

always already presupposes and builds on what I call a pre-scientific, or pre-empirical, mind-body distinction.

Proceeding from these two analyses, I then suggest that we can further identify two different, yet intertwined senses of the naturalist mind-body problem informing and hidden underneath the explicit formulation of the problem. This then results in two different attempts to re-write the sense of the mind-body problem. In the first -rewriting, I suggest that the mind-body problem, especially as it comes to expression in its pre-scientific, or pre-empirical form, hinges on a dynamics between the inner and its expression *in the relationship with, and desire for, the other*. The second re-writing, again, localises in the naturalist mind-body problem an entanglement of different aspects that shift from a mind-body problem, through a mind-brain and mind-science problem, to a concern with the mind's relation to truth and hence expresses a concern internal to the nature of the mind itself; a mind-*mind* problem. It is this second re-writing that then functions as the bridge to the following chapter, where, through a detailed discussion of both Francis Bacon and René Descartes, I try to show how the mind-body problem was in fact, for these thinkers, primarily a concern with the corruption of the human soul/will, and that the mind-body problem ought to be understood, also given my analysis of the naturalist mind-body problem, as one in which epistemology essentially forms an undivided whole with moral-existential concerns.

### **Some Basic Points of Divergences within Naturalist Philosophy of Mind**

As our aim will not be to attempt to find the most adequate *solution* to the naturalist mind-body problem, what is of greater interest than the internal differences and conflicts found in naturalist philosophy of mind is the shared or common background in relation to which the different theoretical adventures and solutions promote themselves. However, without at all looking at the differences we would not be able to appreciate the force and weight this common background has; the decisive role it plays. What I will provide here will only amount to a rough, but for our purposes sufficient, characterisation of, what to my mind are paradigmatic representatives of the naturalist strand I am referring to and its internal theoretical divergences.

There are roughly two complimentary ways of dividing the naturalist field (as I now want to identify it). On the one hand, it can be divided between the so called reductionist and the non-reductionist camp. That is to say, it can be divided between, on the one hand, those who think that mind or consciousness is a kind of fiction or illusion created by the brain—that there is no real, as it were,

entity involved in mind/consciousness over and above that which can be fully accounted for in terms of third-person objective explanations—and, on the other hand, those who believe that the essence of mind or consciousness must be accounted for in terms of the subjective and qualitative states of consciousness (“phenomenal consciousness”), which cannot be reduced to a third-person account. Another division again poses as rivals, on the one hand, those who are committed to the idea that there is a rigid scientific explanation available to *how* mind or consciousness is produced by, emerges from, and/or is a feature of, the workings of the brain (the natural world), and, on the other hand, those who see the scientific enterprise as necessarily failing this task. Now, while it is quite clear that reductionists place high hopes on the objective explanations of science, there are also those non-reductionists who believe that we can aspire for a scientific explanation of *how* the mind is produced by the brain, while keeping to the notion that the mind is irreducibly and essentially ‘subjective’.

According to one of the most prominent figures of the ‘reductionist camp’, Daniel Dennett, there is no scientifically (or otherwise rationally) warranted justification for postulating an independent existence of the mind or consciousness over and above what can be captured by a “mechanistic naturalism”, that is to say, by a purely third person-perspective (Dennett 2006, p. 5). Although subjective experiences, allegedly, certainly appear to the subject him/herself as constituting a real entity/unity, Dennett holds that consciousness is nevertheless more like a fiction created by our brain; an abstraction akin to the centre of gravity (Dennett 1991, pp. 95-96; 410). Roughly put, Dennett does not deny that our ‘everyday’ experiences seem to be disassociated from our brains; that it looks “as if” our minds were *not* simply a functional feature of the workings of our brains but something else, something independent, something unaccountable from the “third-person perspective”. Our so-called folk- or garden-psychology—our ‘everyday’ beliefs about ourselves and others—is, so the argument goes, based on this naive and even superstitious pre-theoretical setup. Unlike the more radical—and perhaps more honest—reductionists, the so called eliminativists (Churchland & Churchland 1998), who propose that a fully (scientifically) enlightened humanity would need to evolve from a folk-conception and –language to a fully neuroscientifically informed one—i.e. to eliminate all references to ‘mind’, ‘consciousness’, ‘values’, ‘beliefs’ etc. altogether—Dennett has a slightly more modest approach. Instead of fully discarding folk-psychology, he thinks that this ‘proto-theoretical’ account must be given a fair trial since it has proven to work/function at least in some respects beneficially throughout evolution (Dennett 1991; 1996). Hence the aim of a rigorous “science of consciousness” will be to carefully analyse, correct and revise our folk-psychological concepts so as to rid them of any scientifically suspect and unverifiable content, and if needed, discard those beliefs and notions—e.g. that our subjective experience cannot be explained by reference to

a functionalistic-mechanistic theory—that simply cannot be integrated into a scientifically informed understanding of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Like all naturalists (whether they belong to the reductionist or non-reductionist camp) John Searle, a prominent representative of non-reductionism, holds that mind or consciousness is "Above all [...] a biological phenomenon", "along with digestion, growth, mitosis, and meiosis" (Searle 2002, p. 7). However, unlike the reductionists, Searle claims that there is a feature of the brain whose intrinsic nature is that of (that has the 'qualitative' character of) subjective experience, or "qualia", which "are private to" the person whose experience it is (Ibid., p.7). So consciousness or the mind is a biological phenomenon just as real as digestion, only that, in contrast to many (all?) other biological phenomena, which are characterised by what Searle calls an objective or "third-person ontology", consciousness (i.e. the feature of the brain that *is* consciousness) has a "first-person ontology" (Ibid., p. 47). In other words, consciousness cannot be, pace Dennett, accounted for as a fiction or illusion created by the brain. It is not a virtual abstraction, but instead itself a 'real' and irreducible feature of physical reality (Searle 1997, p. 99). On the other hand, siding here with Dennett, Searle nevertheless holds that consciousness, although characterised by a subjective ontology, can and should be studied and explained by a third-person objective science: science should explain *how* "brain processes cause consciousness" (Searle 2002, p. 25).

Instead of Dennett's functionalist mechanistic naturalism, Searle is then advocating what he calls a "biological naturalism" (Searle 2002, p. 47). Searle thus rejects Dennett's functionalistic idea that mind or consciousness is to be likened to soft-ware implemented in the hard-ware of the brain (Dennett 1991; 2006), arguing instead that what a science of consciousness must explain are the (real, not virtual) causal powers in the biological brain that are responsible for consciousness. Searle's belief is that although we could, say, create a robot that exhibits all the proper behavioural dispositions of a conscious being, the real feature of consciousness would itself nevertheless be left out. His argument, which builds on his famous 'Chinese room argument' (Searle 1980), is that functionalistic/computational properties do not account for real properties (real causal powers), as the former are "observer relative" while the latter are "observer independent" (Searle 1992; 2002). And, Searle concludes, since consciousness is a real feature of the brain, what we first of all need to explain are the causal powers in the biological brain (the natural and observer

14 The idea presented by Dennett is that our "folk-psychological" notions are comparable to that of "folk-physics". So just as our "folk" ideas of the physical universe have been forced to sometimes be revised and corrected, and sometimes even completely eliminated in the face of a *science* of physics, our folk-psychological concepts will have to face the same destiny in the wake of a "science of consciousness" (Dennett 2006, p. 31-35).



independent object) that generate consciousness (Searle 1997, p.189-214). If and when we get this explanation, then we can possibly even create artificially real conscious beings and not only automatons based on functionalistic-computational, that is, observer dependent, 'outer behaviour'. For while the latter would (conceptually) entail, as it were, that real phenomenal consciousness is projected onto the automaton (observer relative), the former, the biological causal mechanisms of the brain, would manifest an observer independent and 'real' natural being with consciousness (Searle 1992; 2002)

Now, although Searle thinks—as does Dennett, but for different reasons—that he has laid the philosophical/conceptual ground for a research programme for a science of consciousness—that is, transformed the mind-body problem from a philosophical to a scientific problem/research programme—he nevertheless admits that we are currently completely at loss as to what a theory that would explain *how* phenomenal consciousness is caused by, arises out of, third-person objective states of the brain should and even could look like (Searle 1997, p. 197). However, according to Searle, since “we know in fact that brain processes do cause our states of consciousness” we then “have to assume that it is at least in principle discoverable *how* it happens” (Ibid., p. 197). Dennett in turn of course thinks that we already know more or less how such a theory should look like, since such a theory does not have to account for any essential “first-person ontology” but is rather fundamentally constructible in functionalistic terms.

Thomas Nagel, also a prominent representative of the non-reductionist camp, although in complete agreement with Searle about the irreducibility of consciousness and the fact that “the mind is after all a biological product” (Nagel 1986, p.31), thinks that the explanatory challenge of the mind-body, or rather mind-brain, problem is even more dramatic than Searle lets us understand. “If and when” a theory of consciousness—one that will account for *how* brains produce subjective experience without reducing it to a third-person explanation—“arrives”, Nagel explains, “it will alter our conception of the universe as radically as anything has to date” (Ibid., p. 51). What such a theory also seems to imply, Nagel notes, is a form of panpsychism, “since the mental properties of the complex organism must result from some properties of its basic components, suitably combined: and these cannot be merely physical properties, or else in combination they will yield nothing but other physical properties” (Ibid., p. 50). According to Nagel then, it is only by taking seriously exactly how challenging the solution to the mind-body problem seems to be that we come to recognise that what we are in fact in need of here is some sort of, not only theoretical advancement, but also a revolution in our conceptual horizon (Ibid., p. 51-53).

Colin McGinn, yet another prominent non-reductionist, has argued that the conceptual innovations, as noted by Nagel, needed for an explanation of *how* consciousness is produced by the brain, are themselves unthinkable (McGinn

1991). McGinn's claim here is that the *science* of consciousness is a non-starter, although, again, not because the brain does not *in fact* produce consciousness, for "we know *that* it does so" (McGinn 1999). Rather, what stands in between us and a scientific explanation of consciousness is what McGinn calls "cognitive closure" (cf. Ibid., pp. 43-76), that is, a structural limitation in our cognitive capacity that prevents us from answering the question of *how* brains cause consciousness (Ibid., 46). As McGinn explains:

Cognitive closure results from the fact that this partialness is inherent in the two modes of apprehension [introspection and perception]. There is no way to modify or extend introspection and perception so that they can transcend their present limitations [...] To put it baldly, it is part of the very essence of consciousness that it not be perceptible by the kinds of senses we have, but that means that it can never be integrated with an object—the brain—whose essence is to be perceptible (Ibid., p. 51)

The above sketch of different theoretical approaches to the naturalist mind-body problem is certainly not meant to be an exhaustive characterisation of the different contemporary naturalist approaches. The variety of different theoretical solutions or approaches is huge. Nor do I wish to claim that my depictions have captured the depths and complexities of the theories very briefly presented above. However, I hope that it has become to some extent clear that on the surface level the disagreements and divisions between and even within the reductionists and non-reductionist camps seem to run deep. Now, as I already mentioned, our real interest and focus will not be with trying to sort out which of these different 'solutions' to the problem are valid and which are not. Rather, our interest lies with the form or structure of the problem itself, with the common point of departure—the shared ground—from which the mind-body 'problem' springs in different directions and seeks different solutions or dissolvments.

### **The Shared Background of Naturalist Philosophy of Mind**

We have already, I think, seen quite clearly that the disagreements and divergences within the naturalist project derive their vital force from a mutual agreement on the nature of the problem. That is to say, the disagreements and divergences are not about *what* the mind-body problem *is*, but rather about how to deal with it. And what exactly is the problem? In a somewhat superficial sense, the answer is quite simple. Just look at these following quotes from the four thinkers alluded to above.

My first year in college, I read Descartes's *Meditations* and was hooked on the mind-body problem. Now here was a mystery. How on earth could my thoughts and feelings fit in the same world with the nerve cells and molecules that made up my brain? (Dennett 1991, xi).

How can we reconcile our common-sense conception of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, speech-act performing, rational agents in a world that we believe consists entirely of brute, unconscious, mindless, meaningless, mute physical particles in fields of force? How, in short, can we make our conception of ourselves fully consistent and coherent with the account of the world that we have acquired from the natural sciences, especially physics, chemistry, and biology? (Searle 2002:1)

Given our objective understanding of physical reality, the question arises, how does such an arrangement of basic physical materials, complex as it is, give rise not only to the remarkable physical capacities of the organism but also to a being with a mind, a point of view, a wide range of subjective experiences and mental capacities (Nagel 1986, 29).

The question as to the relation between mental phenomena and physical states of the body, specifically of the brain, is generally referred to as 'the mind-body problem'. There is a reason for calling the question of the nature of this relation a problem, which may be put as follows. When we think reflectively of mental phenomena we find that we acknowledge them to possess two sets of properties: one set which invites us to distinguish the mental realm from the physical, the other which firmly locates the mental within the physical world. Among the first set of properties are subjectivity, infallible first-person knowledge, consciousness, meaning, rationality, freedom and self-awareness. These properties are not to be found in the world of mere matter, and so lead us to suppose the mind to be set apart from the physical body: we seem compelled to accord a *sui generis* mode of reality to mental phenomena (McGinn 1996, 17)

So, as I said, on a superficial level it is quite obvious what the essential problem or challenge of naturalist philosophy of mind is: to give an account of how we can place mind or consciousness *within* the world (the brain) so that it does not come in conflict with the world as depicted by modern natural (techno)science, or rather in conflict with the world as understood through the (techno)scientific worldview. However, I want to continue asking what kind of problem this really

is? Or; where does the constituents of this problem lie and what are the presuppositions underpinning this alleged problem?

I propose that we can, and should, differentiate two features, assumptions, beliefs, or commitments, which are fused together in the naturalist mind-body problem: (i) a commitment to a naturalistic-scientistic worldview, and (ii) a pre-theoretical, pre-scientific, assumption that the mind-body problem is rooted in the fact that subjective experience (as subjective experience) is “noumenal with respect to perception” (McGinn 1991, p. 11). Now my suggestion will be that the naturalists move unthinkingly from the pre-scientific mind-body problem to the mind-brain/science problem, and that this unthinking reflects the way both of these two features involve their own confusions. We begin with (i).

### *Existential naturalism*

Now, whether they are reductionists or non-reductionists, all four of the thinkers alluded to hold as their definite starting point that mind/consciousness must be found *within* the natural world. It must not, in other words, be ‘postulated’—because it is not, allegedly, necessary—that mind is its ‘own substance’ and belongs to a supernatural domain of reality that is separated, ‘metaphysically’, from the ‘natural’ domain of reality. Naturalists are of course unable to provide any commonly accepted proof or arguments for why this is so, because what would count as a justified argument is what the internal debate and disagreements are all about. Nevertheless, the challenge that naturalist philosophy of mind takes itself to face is not, ‘*is* the mind in/part of the natural world’, but rather *how* it is so. Colin McGinn thus quite rightly and accurately dubs the naturalists’ primary position (presupposition) “existential naturalism” (McGinn 1991, pp. 87-88).

However, the world in which mind must find its place is a quite specific world or nature. That is to say, it is the world/nature as depicted by modern natural science. This is made quite clear in all of the above quotes. As Searle puts it elsewhere: “To accept dualism is to deny the scientific worldview that we have painfully achieved over the past several centuries” (Searle 1997, p. 194). Or, as Dennett notes: “there is now a widespread agreement among scientists and philosophers that dualism is—must be—simply false: we are each *made of* mindless robots and nothing else, no non-physical, nonrobotic ingredients at all.” (Dennett 2006, p.3) I think that both Searle and Dennett are quite wrong in claiming that dualism, or the supernatural, is in any general sense a threat to modern science. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, the programme of modern science is built on a dualistic/supernatural cosmology, and can do just great with mind-body dualism. Nevertheless, Searle’s and Dennett’s comments

obviously reflect the spirit of our times quite well, which indicates that rather than saving the rationality of modern science, we are, for some reason, hysterically attempting to get rid of dualism (the supernatural). Be that as it may, the challenge that naturalist philosophy of mind perceives itself to be facing is then how to give a *scientific* account of the, as it were, *essence* or *truth* of mind/consciousness. And this is so whether or not one thinks that no scientific account can be given—cf. Nagel and McGinn—as it is nevertheless (something resembling a) scientific explanation that marks the criteria of success for the ‘solving’ of the mind-body problem.

The brain has, because of this existential commitment to the scientific worldview, come to represent the body in the mind-body problem. The naturalist mind-body, or mind-world, problem *is* a mind-brain, or rather, a mind-science problem. For if the challenge is to fit mind within the world as depicted by natural science, then one must locate and approach the mind-body question as phenomena are approached in terms of natural science. And this seems to mean, for the naturalists, to seek explanatory models or theories in terms of ‘effective causation’—*how* “brain processes cause consciousness” (Searle 2002, p. 25). Now this empirical-theoretical research project, to which Descartes (the great dualist) himself notably contributed, has led to the attribution of the locus of mind-body/world *correlations* to the causal workings of the brain. This attribution obviously has notable and legitimate/sound empirically established motivations. However, it is important to note how arbitrary *correlations* between mind and brain are in terms of what one might call ontological commitments. Take for example the following suggestion by Dennett in his *Content and Consciousness*.

The philosophy of mind initiated by Ryle and Wittgenstein is in large measure an analysis of the concepts we use at the personal level [everyday talk about our mental/psychological life] and the lesson to be learned...is that the personal and the sub-personal [the neurological] levels must not be confused. The lesson has occasionally been misconstrued, however, as the lesson that the personal level of explanation is the only level of explanation when the subject matter is human minds and action. In an important but narrow sense this is true, for as we see in the case of pain, to abandon the personal level is to stop talking about pain. In another important sense it is false, and it is this that is often missed. The *recognition* that there are two *levels* of explanation *gives birth to the burden of relating them*, and this task is not outside the philosopher’s province [...]. There remains the question of how each bit of the *talk* about pain is related to neural impulses (Dennett 1969, pp. 95-96, emphasis added; restated in Bennett *et.al.* 2007, pp. 78-79).

Dennett does not—nor do other naturalists—deny that our pre-theoretical, everyday or “folk-psychological” experiences and language involve certain tendencies that *seem* to make the mental incommensurable with the physical (more or less, so it is thought, akin to Descartes' dualism). Namely, when one feels pain one does not as such—‘ordinarily’, ‘pre-theoretically’—understand or conceptualise such sensations as neural, nor do the concepts of pain and neural impulses have the same *use* in our everyday “folk psychological” language. This is not in dispute. Nevertheless, Dennett sees, as do other naturalists, the empirically established mind-brain correlations as somehow implying a “recognition” that the two different, let us call them language-games, of subjective experience and objective brain goings-on are two “different *levels* of explanation”. That is to say, what Dennett and the naturalists want to say is that talk of pain and neural impulses are two different *levels* of explanation of one and the same phenomena/‘world’. Mind is, after all, “a physical, biological phenomenon—like metabolism or reproduction or self-repair” (Dennett 2006, p. 57), “entirely caused by brain processes” (Searle 2007, p. 99). However, as far as I can see, it is exactly this that our experience and talk of pain does not at all tell us. That is to say, there is no notion of *level* (ontological or epistemological), implied automatically, neutrally, in our talk of pain and neural impulses. Rather, I would suggest, it is only Dennett’s appeal to the “recognition” that talk of pain and neural impulses constitute “two different *levels* of explanation” that is the reason why mind-brain correlations are taken to constitute, well, “two different *levels* of explanation”. The ‘clarity’ achieved here is, as far as I can see, illusory.

It is crucial to note that there can be all kinds of reasons that “give birth to the burden of relating” mind-brain correlations. For instance, we might have, and do have, all kinds of medical/therapeutic reasons for asking about mind-brain correlations, none of which *need* to involve any “recognition” about “levels”—although all kinds of ontological/metaphysical notions, theories, claims can be, and usually are, retrospectively latched on to these. We might, and in fact do have, quite effective theories about mind-brain correlations that do not as such rest on or necessitate any commitments beyond the effectiveness of the theory about correlations. In other words, a very effective theory about mind-brain correlations need not say—cannot say—anything beyond that when *x* occurs in the brain, the subject will be/feel/experience (or not) *y*. Nevertheless, naturalists see in mind-brain correlations the seeds of naturalism’s justification and validity. For the correlates, especially when we know how to *produce* them by way of effective causal powers, in a certain sense imply that ‘mere’ physical manipulation/causation ‘causes’ certain mental experiences or states. This is, however, not justification enough in itself, and Descartes—being a dualist as he was—had no problems with saying that mere physical movements of the “animal spirits” caused or resulted in certain conscious experiences and states, that is,

ideas in the mind (cf. Descartes 1967a; 1967b). One way of explaining why it is no counterargument against dualism to ‘cause mental states’ by way of physical manipulation, is to point out that in such cases we operate *within* a *given* world, that is, with a given brain and a given mind. In other words, that we can bring about certain mental effects by way of physical ones (and *vice versa*) is due to the (conceptual/grammatical) fact that the *correlations* (already) exist. And as we do not know *how* they exist by virtue of the correlates themselves, we have no way of proving, empirically, for instance that Descartes (1967a) was wrong, or that Leibniz (1985) was wrong when he proposed that the mental and the physical are substantially separate yet aligned in divine harmony.

However, what if we knew *how* one could *produce/construct* a conscious being/machine? Would this not be indisputable evidence for naturalism’s truth? What could Descartes say if we had a theory that would enable us to actually produce/construct a conscious being with only physical/causal ‘ingredients’, that is, without any given ‘mental ingredients’? Nevertheless, here again, we can see what internally divides the naturalists: the reductionist/non-reductionist disagreement revolves around the question as to what it means to know *how* to construct/produce minds. For Dennett and the functionalists, mind *is* what mind *does*. That is to say, the question of *how* does not pose any research/theoretical challenge over and above what can be, would be, identified as a mind, i.e. would function ‘indistinguishably’ (whatever the criteria for this might be—I gather that the criteria themselves must be put in functionalist terms, namely ‘whatever works’<sup>15</sup>) from someone with (whom we take to have) a mind, and who had the proper defining neural goings-on (Dennett 1991). This means that a functionalist need never worry about attributing any meaning to mind/consciousness over and above the importance it plays for the development of a ‘sufficient’ functional system: mind/consciousness is simply a practical, theoretical, abstract, entity. Again, Searle and the non-reductionists, on the other hand, in conjunction with finding it absurd to think of conscious experience as not manifesting a ‘real’ ontological feature/entity of reality, point out that functionalist theory, with its computational foundation, misses the fact that computing is never a real, observer independent, natural property and does not itself contain any causal powers (Searle 1992; 2002). So a functionalist theory, one that did not conceptualise mind in terms of (biological) causal powers but only in terms of computational systems, would simply produce a functional system that did not necessarily contain any of the actual/real causal powers involved in ‘genuine’ consciousness, but only a system onto which the observer would, as it were, project the features of consciousness: just as it is only we the conscious observers who see or conceptualise a calculator as ‘calculating’—it is

15 See Dennett’s statement on the issue in (Dennett 2007, p. 87)

only calculating ‘for us’—while the calculator’s real causal system does not produce any observer-independent conception of calculation—‘it’ does not understand itself to be calculating. Hence, the notorious dispute over ‘*zombies*’ (e.g. Dennett 1991; Searle 1992), and hence Dennett’s claim that the ‘self’ of the subject is exactly not anything real but only virtual—a virtual representation of the system itself to itself (Dennett 1991).

Still, suppose we did manage to build something that would be indistinguishable from living, conscious, beings. Suppose even that this artificial being would be based on a causal theory—whatever that might look like/mean—and not only on a functionalist theory. Would this be indisputable evidence for naturalism? Well, perhaps if one takes indisputable to mean that such a theory would not incorporate into itself anything over and above, what we call, ‘physical’ entities. Or is it so? For, because such a theory would involve a description of how *neural* events resulted in *mental* ones, it seems that one cannot over-rule, definitely, a complimentary description or understanding of the theory and the result it produced, namely the mind, which would propose, say, that in bringing about such and such physical states a divine portal is opened and a soul springs from beyond time and space into the world and entangles itself with those causal powers.<sup>16</sup> Incredible, perhaps, yet not logically impossible, not at least more impossible than the idea of consciousness arising out of ‘mere’ physical causation. I think that this is a central feature of McGinn’s claim about “cognitive closure”. That is to say, I take it that what he is saying is that we have no way of definitely establishing *one* theory that would exclude all other possibilities, because each account will always and necessarily involve, as it were, a leap of faith rather than indisputable epistemic infallibility/clarity. Perhaps the ultimate point of McGinn’s arguments is that causal explanation always involves a conceptual gap, namely how one thing/state results in another (or how one state emerges out of another). Because of this conceptual gap internal to the concept of causation, and the concepts of matter/brains and mind/consciousness, it can thus never exhaustively be shown to us *how* neural events *are* mental ones, only that when certain neural events happen, certain mental states are experienced. We can—allegedly—know *that* mind is a feature of the brain, and we can indefinitely expand our knowledge of *how* to utilise this ‘fact’, i.e. we can indefinitely become greater masters over mind-brain correlations. Yet, our knowledge *that* mind is a biological phenomenon like metabolism, I would argue, in turn rests on, presupposes, an existential naturalist commitment; the knowledge *that* this is so, *is* the existential naturalist commitment. Or; it is the naturalist’s epistemic commitment/stipulation that produces or constitutes the ontological ‘evidence’.

16 McGinn makes a similar, and I think valid point in his “Consciousness and Cosmology: Hyperdualism Ventilated” chapter in *Consciousness and its Objects* (McGinn 2004, pp. 136-168).



### *The pre-scientific mind-body problem*

Dennett writes:

[Y]ou know you have a mind and you know you have a brain, but these are different kinds of knowledge. You know you have a brain the way you know you have a spleen: by hearsay [...] You are more intimately acquainted with your mind—so intimately that you might even say that you are your mind [...] This suggests that each of us knows exactly one mind from the inside, and no two of us know the same mind from the inside. No other kind of thing is known about in that way. (Dennett 1996, p. 2-3)

Reductionists and the non-reductionist take themselves to be disputing about the very essence of the mind. However, there seems to be no dispute about the way in which the mind at least ‘appears’ directly, naively, consciously, to the experiencing subject. Namely, as constituted by a unitary, private, ‘point of view’, seemingly incommensurable with the public and objectifying gaze. Moreover, it is this, alleged, pre-theoretical, everyday or naïve sense of the self that constitutively thematises the mind and body as distinct and opposed/incommensurable things. That is, it is this alleged self-experience of the subject *that instantiates the possibility/conditions for the project of finding explanatory theories of how the mind or the inner stands in relation to the body/brain or outer*. Without this basic split between the inner and the outer in the experiencing subject, there would be nothing to explain; no project for the naturalists to champion. Or rather; the project of finding explanatory models for how the, as it were, inner stands in relations to the outer, seems to reflect or derive its existential force from the tensions internal to the way in which the inner and the outer are pre-theoretically thematised. It is this apparently *given* split in the experience of the subject, presupposed by the naturalist mind-body *problem*, which constitutes the focal point for this thesis. What are the dynamics internal to this allegedly *given* experience? What underpins the conditions for the form of the problematic that this experience is supposed to constitute?

Earlier I mentioned that I think naturalist move unthinkingly from this pre-theoretical encounter with the differentiation of mind and body to the mind-brain/science problem. Now I want to add that it seems to me that this unthinking has, in some sense, two dimensions to it. Or, it takes on two to some extent different aspects. Moreover, as it seems to me, both of these dimensions or aspects are concerned with (self-)alienation. In the one, the alienation takes the form of the self’s alienation from the world, or rather the self’s alienation or separation from the truth (‘science’) of the world. In the other, the alienation concerns the self’s or the inner’s relation to expressions *in the relationship with the*

*other*. Much of chapters three and four will be attempts to indicate in what sense these two forms of alienation are, in a constitutive sense, intertwined. However, I will begin here by trying to give a somewhat formal illustration of these two forms or aspects of (self-)alienation internal to the naturalist mind-body problem. So without further ado, I will now give a depiction of the second form of (self-)alienation mentioned above, namely the tension between the inner and expression in the relationship with the other. Directly after this I will turn to the first form of alienation, namely the mind-world and mind-truth alienation, which will also function as the bridge to the next chapter, where we will investigate in more detail how we might come to understand the dynamics of this form of alienation, especially if we turn to the father of modern mind-body dualism Descartes, as well as to the pioneer of the programme of modern science, Francis Bacon.

### **Rewriting the Naturalist Mind-Body Problem I: The Conditions for the Existential Split of the Self**

If the initial gap between mind and body rests, as McGinn puts it, on the fact “that we cannot *see* the mind” (McGinn 1999, p. 51) as mind is *introspected* by subjects themselves, privately, this then seems to imply that the pre-theoretical split between mind and body is one based on a split between the inner and its expression, a split between the self and the other, the other whose mind or soul one desires to see (or avoid); whom one wants to be close to (or take distance from), and with whom one wants to be open, transparent (or from whom one wants be shut off). Why think of it in terms of a split between the inner and its expression? Well, think of it this way: *if* the mind of the other—intentions, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, desires etc.—*were* openly, transparently, immediately, present in expressions, it would be unclear what would motivate the idea that ‘one *cannot* see the mind’ and the associated ‘experience’ (or conviction) that the mind is somehow private, essentially inaccessible to the look of the other—unless, of course, there were instances when someone closed him/herself to such an extent that his/her mind *became* imperceptible. Likewise, *if* I felt that my own words openly and transparently gave expression to my thoughts and feelings, it seems that there would be no obvious reason why I would say that you, or I, ‘cannot’, logically cannot, see my mind. Moreover, under such conditions—that is, *if* what it meant to see the mind *would* be to see the open and transparent expressions of the other (and onelsef)—it would not at all be surprising that one does not, cannot, see the mind in the *brain*: the brain would simply not be ‘the right place’ to look for the mind (cf. Bennett & Hacker 2003).

The question I am driving at here is the following: what could it be that would be left unseen *if* the ‘inner’ would, as it were, travel all the way with its expression; why would we then still feel that something remained *unseen*—what would we, what *could* we, still long for? So, before one can be baffled, anxious, about the seeming opposition between the mind and the ‘world’, or the ‘body’, or the brain for that matter, there has to be a *felt/existential experience* that the other’s and one’s own expressions—and the *responses* to those expressions—leave something concealed; that something, ‘the mind/soul’, remains hidden, as it were, behind the expressions—and the responses to them. For *if* it did not, *if* we would feel that our expressions left nothing behind, *then* the mind would be quite perceptible, just as one’s joy can be seen (e.g. in facial expressions), or as thoughts can be heard (when someone speaks them out) or read (on paper or the screen).

The naturalist dictum is, however, that the mind does not remain hidden occasionally but always, necessarily. “One cannot see the mind”—as far as this is meant to be a purely structural proposition—is not meant to express merely a certain inability that we at the moment happen to be doomed to. Rather, it supposedly expresses a structural condition of human thought in that there is, so the claim seems to go, *no such thing as seeing the mind*, since mind/consciousness is here defined—at least in its pre-scientific, ‘everyday’ occurrence—as that which can only be experienced subjectively, that is, privately by each individual. This is what it means—as far as it can mean anything—that mind cannot be perceived. As Dennett says, “no two of us know the same mind from the inside” (Dennett 1996, p. 3). In other words, mind—as it, allegedly, plays out in subjective experience—is not *hidden* from perception, but rather is simply not of the order of perceptible things in the objective world. Nonetheless, paradoxically, at the same time the epistemological question of naturalism—how can mind be placed *in* the natural (perceptible) world—is built on the presupposition that there *is* something unseen *in* the ‘world’, something hidden (be it virtual or not), which needs to be explained in terms of, or in relation to, that which is seen: this is why the two truths about the mind (‘introspection’ and ‘perception’) need to be “reconciled”, as John Searle puts it (Searle 2002, p. 1). Put in psychoanalytical terms, it seems as if naturalists end up treating or masking an immanent impossibility as the result of an ultimately external prohibition (Žižek 2019; Lacan 1999).

But, we ask, what exactly establishes the *conditions* for this kind of split of the self in two, which then in turn can give rise to a longing for reconciliation, or reunification? Can an alleged structural asymmetry function as a condition for such an experience? Let us say that I see a person cry out in pain, or that my friend tells me of her intention to plant a flower. What makes it possible for me to feel, to cognise, that something of the ‘real’ of this intention or pain—the

mind' of the other—remains unseen to me? What is it, in other words, that makes it possible for there to be a wedge between the other and me? Given the naturalists' basic assumption, it cannot be because on some other occasion nothing was left unseen. I have, according to the naturalist, never experienced, could never have experienced, what it would be/mean to see the mind. Likewise, I have never experienced, could never have experienced, what it would be like to be seen, wholly, by the other. This very notion lacks sense/content. Nevertheless, I must have some contrast to draw on here if I am to say—to *feel*, to *experience*—that *something* is left out and remains unseen: if no contrast is given, how could anybody be in a position to draw the conclusion that mind is *not* perceptible in expression?

Perhaps this experience of alienation arises because I *infer* from my own case of pain, beliefs, intentions etc. that my pain, my thoughts, my intentions, do not present themselves directly, undistorted, in my expressions and that the same applies for others? But how do I know this if there is nothing to know here, that is, if the very notion of the mind's immediacy in expression is senseless? Or, do I know that others do not see my mind? Has my friend told me so? Again, how does she, how could she, know that she has not seen it? Is it because she knows that she cannot see it, that is, is it because she knows what it would be like to see the mind and then, from this knowledge, directly understands that she cannot see it? But what would there be for her to understand here?

As I have tried to point out, the problem with the naturalist dictum that one “cannot see the mind”—or more precisely, with the claim that there is an “experience” of an unavoidable inability of seeing the mind (as it is for the subject) which constitutes the ‘mystery of consciousness’—is that the knowledge that this is so assumes its (impossible) opposite, namely, the notion that ‘seeing the mind’ would entail being the other—or, alternatively, the other being oneself. That is to say, we (allegedly) know that one “cannot see the mind” *because* we know that we (necessarily) cannot *be* the other. However, how can this amount to anything? For the very notion of being the other—not just the sci-fi fantasy of being oneself ‘*in the head of the other*’—is a paradox, a non-thought. If I would become you then I would no longer be me and thus *I* could not see your mind: there is no sense, no content correlating with this ‘picture’. Now the important thing here is to note that it is not me making this claim, but the naturalists themselves; it is internal to the very way in which naturalists want to define what it means to have what they refer to as the qualitative feature of first-person, private, subjective experience. The problem here, then, is not simply that being the other—‘seeing the mind’—is *factually* impossible. Rather, the problem here is that we cannot even imagine it—we cannot really make sense of it: the notion of being the other cannot be made into a sci-fi film. Consequently, the notion cannot even be an object of our fantasies, or of our desire (again, this is what the

naturalists themselves imply). But now, if the notion of 'seeing the mind' really is supposed to be a non-thought, empty, then our (alleged) knowledge that we "cannot see the mind" loses its footing as well.

It is of course true that if someone thinks, feels, sees etc. something, this person will have to give expression to these experiences in some form or other for me to know what the feeling, thought or sensation is. And *vice versa*. But again, what more does this amount to than stating that if we do not express ourselves, we cut off our inner from our outer, that is, cut off our inner from the other. —Or perhaps we should say, 'create an inner that is cut off from the outer, form the other. And here we could of course say that this is what the claim "cannot see the mind" means, only that then this does not mean anything else than exactly that if one does not express oneself, one conceals one's inner from the other (or the other fails to acknowledge what one expresses). That is, we do not, we cannot, think the thought that there is a mind hidden behind the surface that per definition *cannot* be seen, as the point is, well, exactly that there is nothing to think here. Put differently, if the inner is cut off from expression, then the inner cannot be perceived/conceived. However, this cannot always, necessarily, be the case, because then there would be nothing to inform us, there could be no conditions for us to experience, that we were cut off from the inner.<sup>17</sup> Once again, keep in mind that the point here is not to show how the world is, but rather to explicate the implications of what the naturalists themselves 'want' to be the case. That is, to the extent one wants to use the formulation "one cannot see the mind" as the naturalists propose, then *this* seems to follow. That is, if the mind-body problem is rooted in a structural impossibility then there seems to be no problem, whereas if it is rooted in some kind of restriction or prohibition then the problem seems to be of a quite different nature than what the naturalists claims it is.

The problem with the naturalist self-understanding of the 'mystery of mind' is then not only that we really cannot know what the naturalists would want to base the whole mind-body problem on. The more constitutive problem is that the notion that "one cannot see the mind" cannot, in the form suggested by naturalists, really be the actual source of that which constitutes our existentially felt alienation or split—and hence of that which gives rise to the mind-body problem—as this notion really isn't anything that can as such be part of—thematized in—our experience or cognition, let alone our desire. However, we actually do seem to have the existential experience of alienation that underpins the structure of the mind-body problem. The evidence for this is, among other things, that naturalists do feel existentially tied to a mind-body problem, that it

17 The inspiration for these comments originate from Wittgenstein's *Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), and especially remarks 242-308, and even more precisely remark 251.

touches and moves them, regardless of how confused the formulation of the problem itself might be.

In saying that the alleged structural asymmetry between the inner and the outer, mind and brain, does not have the potency to function as a condition for an experience of alienation, and in arguing that the alienation or split of the human self is grounded in a (real) felt split between one's inner and one's expression *in one's relationship to the other*, I am of course also implying that the very condition for this split is that we in fact *do* understand what it means to 'see the mind'. Or more accurately, since I think that the phrase 'to see the mind' is applied in a confused and misleading way, I am implying that we do in fact understand what it means, what it is, to express one's inner directly and immediately and to respond to the other's expression similarly. That is, my point is to say that there is a *possible* and *significant* use to be given to the notion of 'seeing the mind of the other' and to have one's inner 'seen by the other'. What I am implying here is that the condition for there to exist an existentially felt split or alienation of the self and expression in the relationship with the other, is that we can see and exhibit mind just as well as we can and do know what it means to shy away from, and be shut off from, the expressive openness between self and other.

However, if there is truth to what I am proposing, there is surely reason to reflect on why most of the canon of western philosophy (of mind), and more particularly contemporary naturalism, has tended to portray the mind-body problem as ultimately answering to a structurally determined, necessarily impossible condition. A straightforward suggestion presents itself readily, namely that the motive for presenting our existential split or alienation as pertaining to a structural impossibility of 'seeing the mind' lies in this notion's ability to provide a kind of justification for our urge to turn away, hide, from the openness between individuals: it acts as a defensive response to some deeply unbearable trait in lives with, and our desire for, each other. My point here is simply to suggest, or exemplify, that what we might call a 'non-thought', that is, something that takes the form of a proposition such as 'one cannot see the mind', can itself become *expressive* of a desire—while not itself being the (object of) desire; while not itself being a thought. And so, if we examine the (il)logic of 'one cannot see the mind'—or the (il)logic of its opposite, 'seeing the mind'—we will, I think, find that it does not simply express a desire to shy away from the openness between individuals, but *also* contains its opposite desire, namely a desire for the other(s desire for one's desire), that is, a desire for, what I call, open expressiveness. One might say that it expresses a split (in) desire; a dissonance of the soul, as Plato would have it.

What does the (phantasmatic) impossible notion of 'seeing the mind' suggest? That is, what kind of desire does it express? Well, as already noted, it seems to express a desire to fully possess the other, or alternatively, to fully merge with the other: in order to see the mind one would have to be(come) the other, and/or

the other would have to be(come) oneself. In both cases, if any real distinction between the two can be made, the outcome is annihilation of individuality; annihilation of the *relationship*. However, this annihilating desire must of course be understood in relation to another desire that this fantasy carries within itself. For the fantasy of possessing (or merging with) the other contains, nevertheless, a *relational* desire for the other: in order for the question of ‘seeing the mind’—and the reactive response that one “cannot see the mind”—to become thematised in the first place, one must first desire to see—to be with—the other and to be seen, to be desired, by the other. Without such a desire, there could be no problem, no question of ‘seeing the mind’. Yet, this relational desire simultaneously contains, as noted, a phantasmatic desire for a consummate relationship with the other, resulting in an annihilation of the *relationship*. So while the fantasy, on the one hand, functions as a way of making one’s (relational) desire for open expressiveness *impossible*, the ‘cannot’ of the ‘cannot see the mind’ nevertheless simultaneously signals a prohibiting command to ward off the annihilating tendency of desire, arguably, in order to preserve, on some level, although in a distorted fashion, the relationship between self and other. Or, we might say that the ‘cannot’ signals the very impossibility of our desire for absolute non-relation, signals that we in fact do not really, cannot really, desire/want an absolute non-relation (wholeheartedly). Hence, the fantasy at work here is expressive of an internal conflict, a kind of split in desire, or rather, as I will argue throughout the book, a displacement of desire.

### **Rewriting the Naturalist Mind-Body Problem II: The Mind-World Problem as a Mind-*Mind* Problem**

Above I have tried to capture, in a quite crude fashion, the logic of the (self-)alienation constitutive of, what I have called, the pre-scientific, naive or everyday mind-body problem, which takes on the form of a concern with the inner and its expression in the relationship with the other. As I already noted, it seems to me that one can identify also another, intricately intertwined, dimension internal to the naturalist mind-body problem. More specifically, I believe that we can find in the mind-body problem, again in addition to the concern with expression and the other, a concern that takes as its central focus the mind’s relation to truth (and deception/displacement). And while this concern with truth is certainly interwoven with the concern for open expressiveness and the other, it is, in contrast to the concern for open expressiveness, quite explicitly a quintessential aspect of the problem naturalists

themselves claim to be grappling with, namely the question of how to explain mind as a feature of the world as depicted by science.

For the naturalist, the defining question is how to account for mind in scientific terms, that is, as part of the world as depicted by natural science. However, let us rephrase this a bit. Namely, let us shift the focus away from the question of how mind is to be placed in nature, to the question of how the mind/thought is to relate to nature, including mind *as part of nature*. For there seems to be a kind of inversion internal to the naturalist mind-body problem. That is, the naturalist concern is not simply the question of how to place mind in nature (body). Rather, the essential question here seems to be how the 'knowing subject' ought to relate to nature *as the object of knowledge* (including mind as part of nature) in such a way that the locus of knowledge (i.e. 'the subject') does not itself *distort* the 'truth of nature'. To the extent this is so, the naturalist mind-body problem seems to ask not simply how is mind to be placed in nature, but just as much (or even more essentially) how is nature to be moulded by and in 'truth' for the mind, the 'knowing subject'. What I am trying to capture here is simply a rephrasing of the naturalist notion that there is a gap between, on the one hand, our pre-scientific conceptions of ourselves and of 'nature' and, on the other hand, our scientifically informed ones.

My claim is thus that we have reason to understand the naturalist mind-body problem as containing a line of entanglements, which can be represented as follows: mind-body problem  $\leftrightarrow$  mind-nature/world problem  $\leftrightarrow$  mind-science (which extends to a mind-brain) problem  $\leftrightarrow$  mind-knowledge/truth problem  $\leftrightarrow$  mind-mind problem. The phrasing 'mind-mind problem' is of course meant to capture that the naturalist 'mystery of the mind' indicates that the mind-body problem is in some essential sense concerned with the mind's, or thought's, ability, or inability, to see the truth of nature (and consequently the truth of itself as well). Or, perhaps rather; its ability/inability to relate in truth, undistorted, to nature (and thus to its own 'truth'). In short, it is a concern with thought or mind itself, and it is so in a double sense. For the concern here is not only with how mind or thought is to relate in an undistorted manner to nature or 'the world', but also, and with respect to the mind-body problem, with how thought is to relate to itself: what it is about mind or thought itself that veils it from its own truth. Mind or thought is, in other words, forced to play a kind of double role here; on the one hand as the seat or bearer of knowledge and, on the other hand, as the object of knowledge. However, this gap between the knower and the known cannot be bridged from 'immediate' experience, as it were, for there seems to be, as naturalist themselves stress, nothing about thought as such or in itself that would directly relate it to a "biological phenomenon like digestion", that is, neural activity, which it yet, allegedly, *is*. In other words, for the naturalists mind, its truth, is in some fundamental or constitutive sense alien to



itself. Or; it seems that naturalists hold that nature is *structurally* alien to itself. Why? Who can say!

One might perhaps say that the naturalist, or more to the point, the scientific enterprise, is not interested in nature or being as it is directly present to us, but rather about the *truth* of nature/mind. And, because of the split between what we might call the immediacy of mind and its truth (the truth of nature and mind as nature), in order to relate *in truth* to nature, and itself, mind or thought must impose (a part/feature/aspect of) itself upon (another part/feature/aspect of) itself. Science is the key to unlocking the truth of nature—whether or not human cognition has an inherent limiting closure with respect to itself (cf. the internal conflict of naturalist philosophy of mind). Put slightly differently, one might say that the naturalist mind-body problem is committed to the claim that the ‘ultimate’ or ‘whole’ *truth* of nature (including the mind as part of nature) cannot be differentiated from the theory or model of nature, which mind or thought must impose upon itself (upon its own ‘immediacy’).

The above also illustrates how the naturalist entrapment by the existential commitment to anti-supernaturalism, leads the mind-body problem to its internal contradictions. That is, here we can see another aspect or variation of the internal deadlock of the naturalist mind-body problem, which we discussed above in terms of the claim that “one cannot see the mind”. Namely, the anti-supernaturalism forces the naturalist to place the thought that constructs the theory or model (by which the truth of nature and mind is to be found) as itself simply a part of the theory/model it has constructed. It is as if the whole (the truth revealed by scientific thought) was but a feature (part) of the part (the mind as part of nature). Arguably, it is this, rather than, pace McGinn, any “cognitive closure”, that manifests the impasse of the naturalist mind-body problem. Or; this is what the cognitive closure comes to. In other words, the alienation seems to be a feature of the very way in which mind/thought and world/nature is thought or conceptualised. Can this be reduced to a necessary structural feature of the ‘world/nature’?

*If* this is what underpins the cognitive, incommensurable, gap between the subjective and the objective, then our focus must be put on tracing and clarifying the sense or meaning of the supposed constitutive self-alienation and self-world distortion; the question as to why the self is separated from (its own) *truth*. On the face of it, this is a different path than the one opened up by my preceding rewriting of the naturalist mind-body problem, where I suggested that the mind-body problem implies a tension and concern with the self (inner) and its expression in relation to the other. As we go along, these two rewritings will begin intertwining more explicitly. However, the next chapter will concern itself more directly with this second, transmuted, form of the mind-body problem, namely the way in which the mind-world distinction and concern is informed by a concern with the mind’s internal relation to, and alienation from, (its own)

truth. Moreover, one of the leading points of the following chapter will be that while naturalists themselves seem to be quite unclear about how to understand the sources of the existential self-alienation of the human mind, 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophers Francis Bacon and René Descartes held that the epistemic distortions that mark the mind's (distorted) relationship to the truth of nature and to itself, are rooted in a corruption of the soul. In short, the problem was, for them, not simply that humans lacked knowledge, but more fundamentally, that the human will was in some fundamental sense responsible for the epistemic distortions and hence for the *alienation* or *split* and the tension/strife between mind and world/truth, and mind and body. And, as I will suggest, approaching the mind-body question or concern from such an angle helps us to understand better what existential and motivational drives might be involved in the pre-scientific, pre-'truth', mind-body distinction and concern; the concern with open expressiveness and the other.

### Summary

To end this chapter, let us quickly rehearse the central claims and arguments that have been developed so far. To begin with, I have argued that the naturalist mind-brain problem is a somewhat confused mixture of the empirical and the metaphysical: it is as if naturalists wanted to make the metaphysical (philosophical or conceptual) problem into an empirical one, some with greater hope of success (Dennett & Searle) than others (Nagel & McGinn) in solving it. However, the mind-brain combo is an empirically established relationship that hinges on empirical hypotheses that have been verified to a 'sufficient' degree. My claim was, namely, that naturalists themselves in a sense acknowledge that there is nothing in the correlations between mind and brain as such to warrant their claim that the mind is 'nothing but' a natural biological phenomenon "caused by brains". For what in fact 'warrants' the naturalist dictum is their commitment to "existential naturalism", that is, their (epistemic) commitment to—or presupposition of—the notion that we know *that* mind must be a natural biological phenomena, the (epistemic) commitment that we know *that* brains causes minds, although we might not in the end be able to know *how* this is done.

Moreover, I have argued that, what I called the pre-theoretical or everyday experience of the mind-body problem or distinction internal to, or informing, the naturalist framework, centres on a concern with (self)alienation, which in turn is divided into two different aspects or dimensions. On the one hand, the mind-body problem or distinction gives expression to a moral-existential concern with the inner and its expression in the relationship with the other. On the other hand,

the question of how to find oneself (as oneself) in the world expresses the existential concern as to how we, our thought/mind, can, as it were, hit the *truth* of the world and ourselves, a form of self-alienation where the existential, the epistemological, and, so I will argue in the next chapter, the moral intertwine, or rather form a unity.

### III

## *The Mind-Body Strife as a Problem of the Will*

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how we could come to understand the naturalist mind-body problem as underpinned or constituted by an existential concern that unites epistemology with morality or ethics. We take as the point of departure the suggested re-articulation of the naturalist mind-body problem, which proposed that the problem is informed by, or contains, a mind-*mind* problem, that is, a concern with the mind's relation to '*truth*'—and we now begin to ask what this 'truth', which is sought for, is. The chapter begins by focusing on the mind-body problem as a mind-science problem; how to account for the mind in a world as depicted by natural science. I suggest that by looking in some detail at the writings of Francis Bacon, we can see how modern empirical natural science establishes itself as a proposed cure for the displacement of mind from truth and, moreover, how this project is construed within, and answers to, moral-existential-theological-cosmological concerns about the corruption of the human soul and its associated self-alienation. I begin the exploration of Bacon's ideas by drawing attention to the way in which his programmatic depiction of modern empirical science makes a distinction between contemplative and practical philosophy or knowledge, and how this in turn intertwines with the constitutive problem of knowledge/truth. As I depict it, for Bacon the *truth* of nature is something that cannot be differentiated or separated from the very model through which the mind relates to nature. This then sets the metaphysical or structural scene of scientific epistemology, which, as noted, can be found in naturalist philosophy of mind as well. Furthermore, I argue that the constitutive reason for why *truth* is inseparable from the model/theory of nature and the method of knowledge, is not to be found in any structural or formal limitations of the human mind, but rather in what Bacon calls the *Idols of the Mind*. That is, Bacon's central epistemological concern is not with limited knowledge or with ignorance, but rather with those features internal to the mind itself that work, so to speak, against reason or truth. Put differently, Bacon's question or concern lies with why we do not know that which we can and ought to know, and why it is that we misconstrue that which *de facto* is there for us to know. In the end, the *Idols of the Mind* that distort our relationship to truth are underpinned by an

original corruption, by an original sin. Finally, I will attempt to show why and how the mind-body distinction, or the supernatural-natural distinction, is an essential feature of this morally charged concern with truth and corruption (error and sin) internal to, and formative of, the philosophical foundations of modern science and, consequently, the naturalist mind-body problem.

Moving on, and as an introduction or a bridge to the more detailed examination of Descartes' mind-body dualism, I draw attention to some central and defining similarities between Bacon's and Descartes' projects, both in terms of the concern with knowledge (error and sin), and in terms of how the mind-body distinction and dualism essentially intertwines with these concerns. First, I pay attention to the similar kind of distinction Descartes and Bacon draw between contemplative or metaphysical knowledge and practical knowledge. Like Bacon, Descartes places the virtues of power and utility as defining features of practical knowledge, and suggests that it is practical knowledge, that is, power and utility, which constitutes the purpose or aim of all knowledge, including metaphysical knowledge. Following this, I point out that Descartes' concern with knowledge, with how to establish infallible knowledge, must also, as in Bacon, be understood as a concern with error and sin, and more specifically, as a problem of the will, a concern that is directly reflected in the very nature of his mind-body dualism.

Proceeding from the sketch of the similarities between Bacon and Descartes, I turn to a more detailed and extensive treatment of Descartes' meditations on first philosophy and how the question of knowledge must be understood, not simply in relation to a structural or formal limitation or fallibility, but essentially as a problem of the will—and how this is constitutively reflected in the interrelated mind-body distinction and its associated substance dualism. I end with some critical reflections on Descartes' conception of the meaning of 'the problem of the will', which bridges us to the next chapter.

### **Bacon, the Technoscientific Paradigm, and the Ethics of Knowledge**

Now, if the truth of reality must be found in nature, and, moreover, if the truth of nature is normatively bound to scientific 'explanation'—as the naturalists I have been discussing seem to think—then it is no wonder that 'mind' appears as the "last surviving mystery" to this enterprise<sup>18</sup>. For, as we noted, the queer nature

18 Here again it must be pointed out that although some naturalists think the question of *how* mind is connected to the physical world/brain remains forever veiled by our "cognitive closure", they nevertheless hold that whatever the mind is, it is in principle no different from other

of this endeavour to have 'mind' essentially fit within a *scientifically depicted world/nature* seems to amount to the attempt to have that which constructs the scientific theory or explanation *itself* (as internal to the 'knowing subject') become nothing but a part or a feature of that very theory or explanation. Perhaps one might say that the queerness here is that placing the very mind that does the thinking, theorising, explaining, *within* the theory/explanation, leaves the theory as a whole dangling in mid-air, without a footing in anything. It is as if the whole was a feature of *one* of its parts. In short, there seems to be something unfounded in the naturalist commitment to "existential naturalism". Moreover, as noted, there are two components to what McGinn dubs "existential naturalism": (i) the assumption that nothing supernatural exists; everything that exists is natural—is confined within the domain of nature (this assumption is shared with 'relaxed forms' of naturalism): (ii) a certain drive, or pressure, which prescribes that the *truth* of nature is to be essentially related to modern natural science; the truth of mind—and every other natural phenomenon—is essentially revealed in relation to a scientific explanation, although any final explanation might in the end prove to be impossible (with respects to the mind) because of a limitation in our cognitive capacities.

Now, what I want to do next is to illustrate how one might have the same kind of scientific aspirations and visions as the naturalists, yet without any existential naturalistic commitments, and thus, arguably, without the same kinds of —although there might be other insisted—paradoxical features. In fact, as is quite well known, the pioneers of modern natural science took for granted a division between the supernatural and the natural, and this division was, at least in a formal sense, an essential part of the very outlook that they inaugurated. Descartes is, perhaps, the best known of these figures, and his substance dualism illustrates this point nicely, as we shall see. However, we begin with the figure who perhaps most passionately and effectively laid out the programmatic methodological blueprint for a new science of nature, namely Sir Francis Bacon.

### *Knowledge as power*

That the naturalist project of "reconciling" the mind with the scientific worldview essentially centres on the challenge of explaining 'how brains causes minds' indicates quite straightforwardly that the modern scientific outlook is essentially about know-*how*. This is what the modern scientific outlook, from its very programmatic beginning, proposes. In fact, we can find it explicitly

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physical objects and events, that is, in principle no different from those phenomena that are best explained by 'science'.

inscribed in the works of Francis Bacon, as he laid down the programmatic foundations for a new scientific method in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

Bacon is perhaps best known for his proposition “knowledge itself is power” [“ipsa scientia potestas est”] (Bacon 1825). However, Bacon’s announcement in *Novum Organum Scientiarum* that “human knowledge and human power meet in one, for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced” (Bacon 1999a, I:3) is better suited to illustrate the basic temperament prescribed to modern natural science. That is to say, the essential point of Bacon’s philosophical foundations of science was not simply that those who have knowledge have power. Rather, the relation between knowledge and power is meant to be definitional; power *is* knowledge just as much as knowledge *is* power. And, although the relation between knowledge and power surely did have its political dimensions (cf. Gaukroger 2004), power is here to be understood primarily as a power over phenomena, over nature, over creation, not simply over other humans. However, unlike our contemporary, secularised, ‘anti-metaphysical’, existentially naturalistic, scientific age, Bacon divides knowledge into two different categories. As he explains:

From the two kind of axioms which have been spoken of arises a just division of philosophy and the sciences, taking the received terms (which come nearest to express the thing) in a sense agreeable to my own views. Thus, let the investigation of Forms, which are (in the eye of reason at least and in their essential law) eternal and immutable, constitute *Metaphysics*. And let the investigation of the Efficient Cause and of Matter, and of the Latent Process, and the Latent Configuration (all of which have reference to the common and ordinary course of nature, not to her eternal and fundamental laws) constitute *Physics*. And to these let there be subordinate two practical divisions: to Physics, *Mechanics*; to Metaphysics, what (in a purer sense of the word) I call *Magic*, on account of the broadness of the ways it moves in, and its greater command over nature. (Bacon 1999a, II:9)

Despite their categorical differences, for both metaphysics and physics knowledge is tied to, or measured in relation to, power. Knowledge is, in other words, defined in relation to what can be accomplished ‘effectively’ (cf. Bacon

<sup>19</sup> As for instance G.H. von Wright notes, it was Bacon, more than anyone else, who so straightforwardly characterised the fruits of the ‘new’ science of nature in terms of technological advancements. von Wright hence suggests that “the experimental method’s first real theoretician [Bacon] also deserves the label of master-philosopher of technology” (von Wright 1986, p. 55; the quote is my own translation from the Swedish original).

1999a, I:5; I:127; II:3). However, Bacon does not want to do away with ‘contemplative philosophy’ and simply replace it with a ‘practical’ one. Rather, as he explains:

Here is another objection that will certainly come up: that (despite our criticisms of others) we ourselves have not first declared the true and best goal or purpose of the sciences. For the contemplation of truth is worthier and higher than any utility or power in effects; but the long and anxious time spent in experience and matter and in the ebb and flow of particular things keeps the mind fixed on the ground, or rather sinks it in a Tartarus of confusion and turmoil, and bars and obstructs its way to the serenity and tranquillity of detached wisdom (a much more godlike condition). We willingly assent to this argument; it is precisely this thing which they hint and find preferable which we are chiefly and above all engaged on. For we are laying the foundations in the human understanding of a true model of the world, as it is and not as any man’s own reason tells him it is. But this can be done only by performing a most careful dissection and anatomy of the world. We declare that the inept models of the world (like imitations by apes), which men’s fancies have constructed in philosophies, have to be smashed. And so men should be aware (as we said above) how great is the distance between the illusions of men’s minds and the ideas of God’s mind. The former are simply fanciful abstractions; the latter are the true marks of the Creator on his creatures as they are impressed and printed on matter in true and meticulous lines. Therefore truth and usefulness are (in this kind) the very same things, and the works themselves are of greater value as pledges of truth than for the benefits they bring to human life (Ibid., I:124).

There is obviously a story to be told here as to why modern science builds its foundations on the notion that “what in operation is most useful, that in knowledge is most true” (Ibid., II:4), that is, why in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Bacon (amongst others) holds that Scholastic philosophy was but a collection of fanciful abstractions, and that “better surely it is that we should know all we need to know, and yet think our knowledge imperfect, than that we should think our knowledge perfect and yet not know anything that we need to know”. (Ibid., I:126) However, this is not the question we will pursue here. We will not, in other words, try to understand or figure out why utility is placed at the epicentre of modern science.<sup>20</sup> Our focus will rather be on the question of why the truth of

20 For a discussion on these matters, see for instance Taylor (2007), Mumford (2010), Proctor (1991), Gaukroger (2004).



the world cannot, for humans, be separated from the model and method by which the human mind, the 'knowing subject', turns towards the world. Alternatively, our focus will be on the constitutional dynamics that shape the mind-world relation into a mind-mind relation and, consequently, a mind-body relation—or *vice versa*. Moreover, my proposal here is, of course, that the reason why naturalists have this same structure internal to their mind-body problem is that they inherit it from the very soil of modern science and its worldview. Nevertheless, I will not attempt to give a genealogical account or argument here. Rather, I hope that the similarities illustrated will show us, if not a genealogical inheritance, then at least, well, striking or significant similarities.

### *The Idols of the mind: the ethics of epistemology*

Why then does the human mind need a model and method in order to gain access to the *truth* of nature?

Next, with regard to the mass and composition of it: I mean it to be a history not only of nature free and at large (when she is left to her own course and does her work her own way)—such as that of the heavenly bodies, meteors, earth and sea, minerals, plants, animals—but much more of nature under constraint and vexed; that is to say, when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and molded. (Bacon 1999b).

What Bacon seems to suggest is that nature, “when left to her own course”, somehow veils ‘herself’; the object of our desire/knowledge—nature—is there right in front of us, part of our immediate experience, but *her* (inner) *truth* is not transparently exhibited to experience. It is as if she, nature, when left to herself, was not meant for us; as if, in order for us to *know* her (truth), we must master and possess her. In fact, it is perhaps best to say that the object of desire here is not nature but exactly the *truth* of nature or, rather, nature as moulded by, possessed by, the model, or theory, or method, *as* 'truth'. Or, we might say that the desire of modern science (if one can put it that way) is object-orientated, or, artefact-orientated. This sexist depiction of science and its call for a kind of rape of ‘mother nature’ has, for good reasons, been criticised as deeply building on, and even strengthening, patriarchal power structures (Lloyd 1984), as well as leading to “subsequent environmental and ecological disasters that can be traced to man’s technological hubris” (Sargent 1999; see also Toivakainen 2018). Nevertheless, however warranted such observations are, what risks falling out of focus if we only attend to the ways in which the philosophical foundations of

modern science construe a power and domination relationship between mind/reason/man and nature/matter/woman, is that the question of truth and knowledge, the question of nature's *truth*, is essentially entangled with the "workings of the mind" itself. The 'other' of the mind/reason/man is, in relation to *truth/knowledge*, not nature or woman alone, but, perhaps more essentially, mind itself. Alternatively, the other of mind—be it nature or woman—is internal to mind itself. For while truth might be veiled when nature is "left to her own course", this veiling itself is not, as we will see, the constitutive concern of the epistemological challenge. Rather, the concern here is due to something internal to the human condition: the question of why we do not know that which we *can* and *ought* to know.

"To God, truly, the Giver and Architect of Forms, and it may be to the angels and higher intelligences, it belongs to have an affirmative knowledge of Forms [alchemy, metaphysical knowledge] of nature immediately and from the first contemplation. But this assuredly is more than man can do, to whom it is granted only to proceed at first by negatives and at last to end in affirmatives, after exclusion has been exhausted." (Bacon 1999a, II:15). Now while Bacon observes that it is internal to the human condition that our understanding and knowledge are limited, the actual *problem* with this human (epistemic) condition is not simply that humans lack the perceptive capacities of God or angles, but that the human mind/will has a tendency to act *as if* it was *not* conditioned by its essential limitation. Sure, nature veils herself. However, this veiling is due to the nature of human finitude, something that is itself simply a feature of God's creation—and God's creation is God's will, which is Good. This veiling would not result in "fancy abstractions", that is, it would not result in false judgements and false claims to knowledge, if not for the "Idols which beset men's minds" (Ibid., I:39). Bacon distinguishes four different classes of Idols: "Idols of the Tribe", "Idols of the Cave", "Idols of the Marketplace", and "Idols of the Theater" (Ibid., I:39).

The *Idols of the Tribe* have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men. For it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things. On the contrary, all perceptions as well as of the sense as of the mind are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolors the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it. (Ibid., I:41)

The *Idols of the Cave* are the idols of the individual man. For everyone (besides the errors common to human nature in general) has a cave or den

of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature, owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature; or to his education and conversation with others; or to the reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires; or to the differences of impressions, accordingly as they take place in a mind preoccupied and predisposed or in a mind indifferent and settled; or the like[...] (Ibid., I:42)

There are also idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call *Idols of the Marketplace* on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate, and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar[...] words plainly force and overrule the understanding and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies. (Ibid., I:43)

Lastly, there are idols which have immigrated into men's minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also from wrong laws of demonstration. These I call *Idols of the Theater* because in my judgement all the received systems are but so many stage plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion. Nor is it only of the systems now in vogue, or only of the ancient sects and philosophies, that I speak; for many more plays of the same kind may yet be composed and in like artificial manner set forth, seeing that errors the most widely different have nevertheless causes for the most part alike. Neither again do I mean this only of entire systems, but also of many principles and axioms in science, which by tradition, credulity, and negligence have come to be received. (Ibid., I:44)

I think that it is quite clear that The Idols of the Tribe lay, as it were, the foundations to the misjudgements of human understanding, which in turn makes human understanding vulnerable to the other Idols. More particularly, it is the human mind's "assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things", and the fact that "what a man had rather were true he more readily believes" (Ibid., I:49), which underpins also the core of the three other Idols. As Bacon explains, the Idols of the Cave "grow for the most part either out of the predominance of a favorite subject, or out of an excessive tendency to compare or to distinguish, or out of partiality for particular ages, or out of the largeness or minuteness of the objects contemplated." (Ibid., I:58). Likewise, with respect to the Idols of the Marketplace, "men believe that their reason governs words, but it is also true that words react on the understanding", or with respect to the Idols of the Theatre:

But the corruption of philosophy by superstition and an admixture of theology is far more widely spread, and does the greatest harm, whether to entire systems or to their parts. For the human understanding is obnoxious to the influence of the imagination no less than to the influence of common notions. For the contentious and sophistical kind of philosophy ensnares the understanding, but this kind, being fanciful and tumid and half poetical, misleads it more by flattery. For there is in man an ambition of the understanding, no less than of the will, especially in high and lofty spirits. (Ibid., I:65)

As we can see, the core existential deficiency, or corruption, circles around man placing himself at the centre of significance. Moreover, Bacon divides the Idols into those that are “adventitious”—those that “come into the mind from without: namely, either from the doctrines and sects of philosophers or from perverse rules of demonstration” (Bacon 1999b)—and those that are “innate”—those “inherent in the very nature of the intellect” (Ibid.). And, while the former are, “hard to eradicate”, but can be eradicated, the latter “cannot be eradicated at all” (Ibid.). That is to say, the human mind can never ‘by itself, unaided, relate to *the truth of* nature/phenomena without distortion. “There remains”, Bacon thus proclaims, “but one course for the recovery of a sound and healthy condition—namely, that the entire work of the understanding be commenced afresh, and the mind itself be from the very outset not left to take its own course, but guided at every step, and the business be done as if by machinery.” (Bacon 1999a, preface). The mind or intellect needs, in other words, to “force” itself, to discipline itself, to truth by “severe laws and overruling authority” (Ibid., I:47). And, it needs to do so out of a double reason. Namely, because the human mind does not directly perceive the truth of nature (nature veils herself in her immediate and natural form), but also, and more importantly, because of the mind’s inner corruption (the Idols). Moreover, what is proposed as the standard or criterion of truth, that is, the “overruling authority” to which the intellect must subordinate itself, is utility or power over phenomena. Science or knowledge cease to be mere “fanciful abstractions”, that is, they establish a truthful relation to the world, when one knows how to successfully bring about or predict the outcome of well-defined events.

This brings us back to the question why utility or technoscientific know-*how* marches to the forefront of modern science and epistemology. But again, this is not our concern here. Rather, the crucial thing for us is that the mind-world/truth split or tension is located by Bacon not simply as a consequence of the ‘fact’ that human understanding and knowledge is limited, but rather the actuality of error is due to the false judgements that are made in the hubris of the human “assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things”. A sound

assertion, on the other hand, would be one where human limitedness—as it is in fact manifest in the world—is acknowledge, traced, and mapped, and where the intellect continuously proceeds only in “progressive stages of certainty” (Bacon 1999a, preface)—*guided by the dogma of utility*. The truth of nature may well veil herself “when she is left to her own course and does her work her own way” (Bacon 1999b), but error (and sin), that is, false judgements, arise only when the mind itself is “left to take its own course” (Bacon 1999a, preface).

### *The innate corruption of the soul and Original sin*

The innate Idols “cannot be eradicated”. “There remains but one course for the recovery of a sound and healthy condition”. The human mind is doomed, not only and essentially to a limited/non-divine understanding, but to a form of corruption of the mind; to a certain latent misuse of the will. At the same time, however, this innate condition is somehow not fully representative of human nature, as it marks exactly a deficiency or problem. That is to say, this truth about the human innate condition is subordinate to another, truer or higher truth, namely, the truth that reveals the human condition as corrupt. This other, higher truth and its imperative nature, is also the truer truth of humans or the human mind itself: there is “a sound and healthy condition” to be “recovered” for humans.

What we have here, at the core of Bacon’s philosophy, is of course a certain picture of Original sin; of the fall of humanity: humans are originally moulded in the image of God, and God sees that his creation is good. However, humans turn against, that is, transgress the will of God, create their own (independent) will and fall into sin, thereafter being cast out of the garden of Eden and incarnating their transgression in their secular, embodied, existence across generations. In other words, humans are originally in harmony with the will/truth of God, and it is this original unity with truth—‘truth’ as it was meant for humans to be by the will of God—that Bacon’s scientific method seeks to recover. This picture is made explicit in the *Advancement of Learning*, as the following quote illustrates:

I hear the former sort say that knowledge is of those things which are to be accepted with great limitation and caution; that the aspiring to over much knowledge was the original temptation and sin whereupon ensued the fall of man; that knowledge has in it something of the serpent, and therefore where it enters into a man it makes him swell—*scientia inflat* (knowledge puffs up) [...] To discover, then, the ignorance and error of this opinion and the misunderstanding in the grounds thereof, it may well appear these men do not observe or consider that it was not the pure

knowledge of nature and universality (a knowledge by the light whereof man did give names unto other creatures in Paradise as they were brought before him, according unto their properties) which gave the occasion to the fall, but it was the proud knowledge of good and evil, with an intent in man to give law unto himself and to depend no more upon God's commandments, which was the form of the temptation. (Bacon 1999c, Objection I and Response)

Bacon thus identifies original sin, as did St. Augustine (1952a) before him, as the human will to place itself as the measure of all things.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the sound and healthy condition that science is supposed to recover is the language of Paradise. Or, perhaps it is better to say that science can recover the state of mind (the mind-world and mind-truth relation) of Paradise because it *is* the language of Paradise. For the names that man gave to animals and other creatures in Paradise, was based on the “properties” of those creatures, and, as Bacon envisions it, knowing a property of nature is to know how it works, how each part relates to the other, to know the organisation of things. In short, what Bacon seems to envision his new method of science achieving is a pure vision of the *truth* of creation, where this truth is conceived as a *work* of God, a divine artefact. The scientific method is, fundamentally, a cure for original sin, if not in the sense of eradicating the innate temptation to sin, then at least to discipline the mind so that the effects of original sin are kept in stringent control; mastered. And, to note, original sin is kept in shackles, the mind disciplined and mastered, by disciplining and mastering nature, creation, and its ‘sexual relationship’: if truth can be measured only in relation to utility, one must put truth/knowledge to effective test/use. It is as if the flesh of the individual that Augustine thought it necessary to discipline in order to keep (original) sin at bay, in Bacon inflates or expands to cover nature as such (cf. Toivakainen 2018; Taylor 2007; Proctor 1991).

It should also be noted, then, that the cure that the scientific method and its relation to utility or power is supposed to provide must be understood in ethical terms. When man sinned against the will of God and placed himself as the measure of all things, he abandoned divine charity or love, which is an internal/essential feature of (divine) truth. That is to say, when placing himself as the measure of all things, man distorts and loses touch with the true nature or meaning of knowledge, which God has willed to be essentially connected with the good of all things, and centrally the “good of men and mankind” (Bacon 1999c, I: Objection 1 and Response). Knowledge, when centred on what man

21 “The devil, then, would not have ensnared man in the open and manifest sin of doing what God had forbidden, had man not already begun to live for himself. It was this that made him listen with pleasure to the words, ‘Ye shall be as gods’” (Augustine 1952a, XIV:12, p. 388)

fancies to believe, becomes empty, idle, and does not really contribute to bettering the human condition. Baconian modern science, which states “what in operation is most useful, that in knowledge is most true” (Bacon 1999a, II:4), is, on the other hand, a form of knowledge that really aims at accomplishing things, and the means by which humans really can improve the quality and longevity of human life. Nevertheless, Bacon was to some, arguably, rather limited, sense aware of the potential problems with placing success in utility/power as the mark of truth. For what he did not want this to mean was that whoever is able to produce the most comfort or riches, is by definition closest to truth. Rather, he thought that “works themselves are of greater value as pledges of truth than as contributing to the comforts of life.” (Bacon 1999a, I:124), and that it is the, in some sense, ‘neutral’ knowledge of the works of nature that will educate and cultivate the mind in such a manner that the mind also comes to see to what use knowledge is to be put, that is, what “the good of men and mankind” really is. One must remember that the method of science was meant to dethrone man’s will to place himself as the measure of all things; that the disciplined mind that reaches truth would also, by definition, be in contact with the good of all things.

I should note, however, that I am not in the business of defending Bacon’s position or ideas. Nor do I want to claim that they are sound or clear. On the contrary, I think the very way in which Bacon frames the ‘problem of the will’, and consequently his ‘remedy’ for human corruption, is confused, and destructive—as I will attempt to argue throughout the remaining chapters. My concern here is simply to give a fair account of Bacon.

### *Mind-body distinction*

It might rightfully be said, I think, that contemporary naturalist philosophers of mind inherit from the Baconian programme their outlook that the *truth* of phenomena is best, or only, accessible through, or must be reconciled or harmonised with, modern scientific explanation. However, while Bacon claims that the *truth* of nature or phenomena cannot, for the human mind, be differentiated from the method, model, theory, that ‘best’ controls and masters nature, he was not pressured by existential naturalism and so was not forced to attempt to place thought itself—i.e. that which constructs the theory/model by which *truth* is reached—as an ontologically natural phenomenon, that is, within the model of nature. He was not, in other words, faced with the paradox of attempting to explain/describe that which constructs the theory or model as simply itself but a part of the theory or model—as contemporary naturalists seem to be.

For Bacon, the human soul, or rather the whole human being is divided, in Platonic spirit, between the rational and the irrational soul. The irrational soul proceeds from “the elements” of the natural world, from “the dust of the earth” (Bacon 1815, p. 168), and it “must be allowed a corporeal substance” (Ibid., p. 170). As to the rational soul: “the substance of the [rational] soul was not, in its creation, extracted or deduced from the mass of heaven and earth, but immediately inspired by God; and as the laws of heaven and earth are the proper subjects of philosophy, no knowledge of the substance of the rational soul can be had from philosophy, but must be derived from the same Divine inspiration, whence the substance thereof originally proceeded.” (Ibid. p. 170) One might perhaps suggest that Bacon is here implying that the ontological position (or at least origin) of the rational soul lacks any (rational) explanation, not because it is irrational, but because it is the very condition for rationality and explanation.

The important thing to keep in mind here is that the essence of the soul, the rational soul, i.e. that which is not from or of nature, is quite differently understood than in contemporary naturalism. The essence of the soul is not “phenomenal consciousness”—the ‘qualitative experience of things’—but rather reason or understanding, including the will (which in turn must be understood in relation to reason). On the other hand, the irrational soul or the appetites and passions of the soul—those features of the mind that are not pure reason, understanding, and will—while shared with the brutes for whom it “is a principal soul, whereof their body is the organ”, “in man it is itself an organ of the rational soul” (Ibid. pp. 171-172). Brutes, that is, who lack a rational soul, i.e. reason/understanding, are thus bound to the movements of the appetites and passions, which are as such part of the nature and movements of “the dust of the earth”. Humans, because of their rational soul, can in turn control and counter the movements of the irrational soul by will and follow the understanding of reason—i.e. the true and the good—just as the appetites and passions can affect the will and understanding of the rational soul; the irrational soul “is itself an organ of the rational soul”: the will is internal to the rational soul, and *vice versa*.

There are thus two interconnected senses in which the essence of the human soul is not part of nature. First, as has been pointed out, reason or understanding is not *in* nature because it is the very thing that construes the model through which the truth of nature is revealed: reason is, as it were, the perceiving or conceiving and not the object of perception/knowledge. Secondly, reason is not part of nature in the sense that in being able to make nature an object of knowledge, humans draw a differentiation between the immediacy of nature and the truth of nature. Moreover, the rational soul, through which truth is revealed, comes with an internal (moral) normativity, a normativity that cannot be found in the objects of nature but only as part of the rational soul that uncovers the truth of nature. Only because of the rational soul, i.e. only because of the ability to differentiate between nature's own immediacy (the irrational soul) and its



truth, does the (free) will exist. Or; only because of the formal differentiation between the immediacy of nature (irrational soul) and the truth of nature, that is, only because of the formal possibility of a distinction between 'natural tendencies' and moral truth, can there be a will and a rational soul. This is what differentiates humans from the brutes. However, and again, the differentiation between the natural and the supernatural, between the rational soul and the irrational, or between mind and body, is essentially intertwined with, not only the formal or structural features that form the conditions for reason and the will, but also with the way in which the soul itself is responsible for the "misuse of the free will", as Descartes puts it (Descartes 1967a, p. 177). That is to say, whereas we on the one hand have a formal depiction of the conditions and structure of the human soul and its relationship to nature and truth, this formal model does not, and cannot itself contain the reasons for, the explanation of, why human formal fallibility and finitude actually results in error and sin. Perhaps one can put it this way: the essence of the human soul, its moral-existential being/truth, cannot be *represented*—this is what makes it 'supernatural'. Nature, on the other hand, is that which can be represented, in one way or another; it can be the object of knowledge. Put otherwise, it is only because of the ontological distance between nature and the supernatural/the rational soul that nature can be rationally 'explained'.

Now, although the "substance" of the soul itself remains outside the reach of any final scientific explanation exactly because it is not itself part of the object of study, but rather its very container, Bacon identifies a class of knowledge that pertains to the "Connection of the Soul with the Body", a knowledge of the "union of the mind and body" that "requires a description of the manner wherein they discover, and act upon each other by notices, or indication and impression." (Bacon 1815, p. 130) Indication is then divided into "physiognomy, which, by the lineaments of the body, discovers the dispositions of the mind" and "the interpretation of natural dreams, which, from the agitations of the mind, discovers the state and dispositions of the body." (Ibid., p. 130) The knowledge of impressions also "has two parts: as considering, 1<sup>st</sup>, how, and to what degree, the humors and constitution of the body may affect the soul, or act upon it; and 2<sup>nd</sup>, how, and to what degree, the passions and apprehensions of the soul may affect and work upon the body." (Ibid., p. 133). However, again, the very thought that constructs these models by which the world and the human soul are to be investigated, and to which the moral/normative meanings of the interactions between mind and body are tied, cannot itself be positioned within the model, but remains substantially, structurally, formally, grammatically, outside of it. The science of the mind-body union is, in other words, a 'practical science'; a science that establishes the truth of its object by way of the successfully gained power or utility over phenomena, over nature, and over body, through the model, theory, reason.

### *Supernatural or second nature?*

Bacon's differentiation of the mind (i.e. the rational soul) from nature, which is an internal feature of the philosophical foundations of his programme for a new science of nature, in many ways resembles John McDowell's critique of scientific naturalism, alluded to earlier in chapter II. More precisely, McDowell's suggestion that the very project of science always already exists within the "space of reason" and cannot investigate it from without, is formally the same as Bacon's notion that the rational soul cannot be found in the elements of the "dust of the earth", which are the objects of scientific knowledge. In short, both seem to agree that scientific knowledge/models are always already within (the space of) reason, and not *vice versa*. Now, the apparent difference between the two thinkers and their respective times is that while Bacon attributes the rational soul to a so-called supernatural origin, McDowell stipulates it as a "second nature", that is, as something emerging out of a "raw nature" through enculturation.

However, I fail to see in what sense McDowell's theory of second nature escapes the fundamental problem of situating mind *in* nature. For, does not McDowell's second nature face the exact same structural impasse as the proposals of scientific naturalism? Scientific knowledge always already exists within the space of reason. On this we agree. But then McDowell seems to suggest that the space of reason is itself a second nature; emerging through enculturation from raw nature. Now, from which 'space' is this notion, theory, or model, itself then cognised or perceived? It seems it cannot be from the space of reason, since second nature is supposedly a higher-order thought that places the space of reason itself *in/as* nature. Then again, this cannot really be so, since the model or theory of second nature is, by definition, exactly something that always already exists within the space of reason; second nature is no less a model or theory than a scientific theory is, it is just of another kind—answering to other criteria—than 'scientific' theory.<sup>22</sup> My point here is that McDowell's introduction of "relaxed naturalism" through the concept of "second nature" fails to recognise the actual structural role played by the 'supernatural'. That is, as far as I can see, the point inherent in Bacon's notion that the essence of mind or the rational soul cannot be found in nature, is simply that mind, or the space of reason, cannot itself be founded on or found in anything but itself; there is no 'outside' perspective on mind/space of reason: it is logically/grammatically excluded. As we will see, this structural point also forms the formal essence of Descartes' substance dualism, even more directly and explicitly than in Bacon's case.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Wallgren develops a related critical argument of McDowell and relaxed naturalism in his excellent paper *Mind and Moral Matter* (Wallgren 2019).

There is of course the question as to what extent the term 'supernatural' is a suitable one for characterising the 'space' of mind/reason. It might not be suitable at all. However, one must bear in mind that neither Bacon nor Descartes ever use the term 'supernatural', although one can obviously understand why the contemporary 'broad naturalists' perspective would understand the Baconian and Cartesian mind as being supernatural.<sup>23</sup> The enemy of contemporary naturalists seems to be the deployment of the divine by thinkers such as Bacon and Descartes. However, as one might see already in Bacon's deployment of the divine, and as will become evident in our discussion on Descartes' substance dualism, God should clearly not be understood here as 'the big guy up in the sky', but rather as intertwined with the concept and grammar of thought or mind, and as supernatural in the same sense as thought or the space of reason—that is, as not *in* the object of knowledge.

Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, as I already mentioned earlier, McDowell's insistence upon 'broad naturalism' through relaxed naturalism and the associated attempt to dissolve the mind-body problem or tension, runs the risk of failing to see that Bacon's, and Descartes' (as we will shortly see), allusions to the 'supernatural' are motivated not only by the 'insight' that the objects of knowledge and any normative claims are always already within the space of reason, and that the nature of mind or space of reason can be founded on and found in nothing but itself, but also and centrally by the concern with why humans fall into error and sin, when this in no way formally/necessary follows from the nature or (formal) structure of things. In short, what we might lose sight of, if we feel obliged to develop philosophical accounts that commit to a 'broad' naturalistic notion of reality and thus solve/dissolve the mind-body problem, is how the mind-body tension is expressive of a moral-existential concern not only with human fallibility, but also with evil and displacement.

<sup>23</sup> One ought, nevertheless, to keep in mind here that especially Descartes uses the term nature in two different senses; in a limited sense referring to the empirical world and in a broad sense: to "the sum of all the things given me by God, since in this sum many things are comprehended which only pertain to mind (and to these I do not refer in speaking of nature) such as the notion which I have of the fact that what has once been done cannot ever be undone and an infinitude of such things which I know by the light of nature [without the help of the body]" (Descartes 1967a, p. 193). That is to say, for Descartes, the supernatural is part of (the) nature (of all things).

## Bacon and Descartes Side by Side

Those who have read their Descartes will immediately recognise deep similarities between his and Bacon's outlooks. The similarities are obviously no coincidence as the two were more or less contemporaries and shared mutual aspirations with regard to the renewing and improvement of human knowledge and welfare.<sup>24</sup> It is nevertheless Descartes, more than Bacon, who has had a decisive impact upon modern philosophy and especially so-called philosophy of mind. As most of us have learned to think of him, Descartes carries the burdensome title of the father of modern philosophy and its 'epistemological turn', as well as the father of modern mind-body dualism. Moreover, he is also perceived to be the original articulator of the modern (naturalist) mind-body (interaction) problem; although, as I will argue, this ascription is partly misgiving. In what follows, we will examine the rationale of Descartes' substance dualism and try to map the concerns that come to expression in it. However, before we dig into Descartes' dualism, let us begin by noting, preliminarily, some defining similarities between him and Bacon, similarities that will become even more evident as we then engage in a detailed examination of Descartes' *Mediations on First Philosophy*.

### *Bacon and Descartes: masters and possessors of nature*

As Friedrich von Schelling notes, "empiricism is renewed by Bacon at the same time as Descartes renews rationalism." (Schelling 1994, p. 61) However, as Schelling himself is quick to point out, the similarities both in terms of basic philosophical outlooks, as well as in terms of methodological practices in the acquisition of knowledge of nature, go much deeper than the differences, which certainly are also there to be found (Schelling 1994; Zittel 2008; Arnăutu 2017). Our focus here will be somewhat limited, centring on the basic philosophical outlooks, and more specifically, on Bacon's and Descartes' shared notions that (i) the essence or substance of the (rational) soul/mind does not belong to, does not originate from, the world (in Descartes terms *res extensa*) which it knows and studies, and (ii) that knowledge is divided into, on the one hand, speculative (Descartes) or contemplative (Bacon) science/knowledge and, on the other hand, empirical or practical knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> From his letters to Mersenne it is evident that Descartes had read Bacon and was well acquainted with his works and the scientific method elaborated by him (Cottingham 2008; Zittel 2008).

While Bacon's never really gave up on the classical idea(l) that contemplative knowledge is "worthier and higher" (Bacon 1999a, I:124), Descartes follows, to some extent and in a specific manner, Bacon's suggestion that the actual aim/purpose of human knowledge is, nevertheless, to establish ways of *producing* welfare and longevity. Bacon declares that because of the innate tendency of the human mind to distort truth "it is safer to begin and raise the sciences from those foundations which have relation to practice, and to let the active part itself be as the seal which prints and determines the contemplative counterpart" (Bacon 1999a, II:4), while Descartes articulates his commitment to the new norms of science in the following way:

I have never made much of those things which proceed from my own mind, and so long as I culled no other fruits from the *Method which I use*, beyond that of satisfying myself respecting certain difficulties which pertain to the speculative sciences, or trying to regulate my conduct by the reasons which it has taught me, I never believed myself to be obliged to write anything about it. For as regards that which concerns conduct, everyone is so confident of his own common sense, that there might be found as many reformers as heads, if it were permitted that others than those whom God has established as the sovereigns of his people, or at least whom He has given sufficient grace and zeal to be prophets, should be allowed to make any changes in that. And, although my speculations give me the greatest pleasure, I believe that others also had speculations which possibly pleased them even more. But so soon as I had acquired some general notions concerning Physics, and as, beginning to make use of them in various special difficulties, I observed to what point they might lead us, and how much they differ from the principles of which we have made use up to present time, I believed *that I could not keep them concealed* without greatly sinning against the law which obliges us to procure, as much as in us lies, the general good of all mankind. For they caused me to see that it is possible to attain knowledge which is very useful in life, and that, *instead of that speculative philosophy which is taught in the Schools*, we may find a *practical* philosophy by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens and all other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted and thus *render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature* (Descartes 1967c, p. 119).

The method Descartes is referring to in the beginning of the quote is of course the method that secured or established—in his and so many others' minds—

infallible knowledge by way of founding it, through his usage of hyperbolic doubt, in the first principle of philosophy, namely the, let us call it, *cogito ergo sum* ‘declaration’. Moreover, the method by which Descartes established the first principle of philosophy/knowledge is, in the quote, identified by him as belonging to the “speculative sciences”, which he places in contrast to “practical philosophy”, that is, in contrast to a philosophy, a science, a knowing, which will “render us masters and possessors of nature”. What then in turn qualifies this contrast between speculative and practical philosophy is somehow tied to the aims and uses knowledge is put to—just as Bacon announced. Simply as a piece of knowledge about the foundations of knowledge, the *cogito* argument/declaration provides only Descartes *himself* with the “greatest pleasure”. Put differently, the first principle of philosophy cannot *as such* be used for any ‘practical’ purposes; for improving human welfare and longevity. The principle is true (how could it be false!), but *as such* it does not yet reveal the *significance* or *purpose* of itself, nor, consequently, of knowledge more generally. Rather, the meaning, or purpose, or significance, of the first principle of philosophy is revealed *only* in relation to “practical philosophy”. The true meaning of knowledge comes to light only through what we can do with knowledge, that is, only with respect to the power over (natural) phenomena it provides us with, given that this is how both Bacon and Descartes envisions the place of knowledge in human life.

Speculative philosophy must tackle the foundational questions. Practical philosophy, it might be said, must in turn show the actual purpose of knowledge by ‘putting knowledge to use’. Moreover, Descartes thinks, like Bacon, that the use or utility of knowledge contains its own internal normativity, namely “the good of all men”. So the contrast Descartes draws here between nature and reason, that is, the call for reason to master and possess nature, reflects or expresses the internal normative call of reason; that reason ought to reign over the irrational soul/nature. If not identical with Bacon’s project, the kinship can, arguably, be thought of in terms of (philosophical) bloodlines.

### *Mind-body interaction and practical philosophy: mind-body dualism and ethics*

The division between speculative and practical philosophy also reflects the relationship between scientific explanation and the human soul. As noted, Descartes, like Bacon, places the substance or essence of the human soul outside of the natural world and thus categorically outside the reaches of empirical/practical science. In fact, for Descartes, the knowing of substances, be they material or immaterial, is always a non-empirical, metaphysical, understanding or knowledge, as it is only the mind in itself (turned on itself) that

can understand clearly and distinctly, which is what understanding substances means (we will return to this issue in the next subsection). Nevertheless, similarly to Bacon, Descartes thinks that “human nature is constituted essentially of a union between two different natures” (Alanen 2003, p. 48; Descartes 1967a, p. 192), namely mind and body. Moreover, this union is not simply an accidental one, but rather forms a “real” or “substantial” union (Alanen 2003, pp. 44–77; Broughton & Mattern 1978). In short, the *living* human being is not simply a pure mind/soul/intelligence, but substantially an embodied being with a specific form of embodied psychology (cf. Bacon’s notion that the irrational soul is an *organ* of the rational soul in humans). Of course, the *essences* of mind and body are, as it were, each other’s opposites: mind or thought is, in its essence, as a clear and distinct idea, that which body is *not*, and *vice versa*. Or, to put it in other terms, the essences of mind and body are internal to their respective concepts themselves. This means, for Descartes, that any thought that is intertwined with or is caused by that which it is not, i.e. body, cannot be clearly and distinctly understood, as it is a *mixture* of two essentially distinct conceptual schemes (Descartes 1967a; 1967b; Alanen 2003). Hence, the union of mind and body and the way in which the two substances interact (correlate), and the psychological life this gives birth to, cannot be known clearly and distinctly. However, while speculative/metaphysical philosophy traces essences and substances, practical philosophy is not concerned with essences but with what it can effectively achieve: how the world, nature, bodies, can be changed/refined, controlled and mastered. So, despite the categorical epistemic limitations concerning knowledge of the embodied mind set by the different natures of mind and body, neither Bacon nor Descartes have any theoretical/metaphysical problems with exercising and developing a practical science with respect to the correlations between mind and body and of human psychology. In fact, again, for both, developing such a practical science of the mind was an essential part of the moral-existential task to refine and develop human existence and its struggle with the irrational forces internal to its embodied nature (and nature more generally). In Descartes’ case, his work *Passions of the Souls* (Descartes 1967b) is a programmatic blueprint for exactly such a science.

It is important to note here that Descartes’, and Bacon’s, mind-body distinction/dualism, was not for them a mind-body *problem*, anyway not in the way contemporary naturalists understand it. That is, the interaction between mind and body was not, could not be, a metaphysical object of knowledge. Rather, it belonged essentially to the domain of practical knowledge: the effective power of prediction and manipulation enabled by the theory is the measure of its truth. It was nevertheless already Descartes’ contemporaries that noticed, or perhaps rather invented, the mind-body interaction problem, which then began living its own life, giving birth to the contemporary naturalist mind-body problem. For instance, princess Elisabeth, in her correspondence with Descartes,

famously challenged Descartes to give an explanation as to how a substance (mind/thought/soul) that did not belong to the extended world of matter could affect, and be affected by, the extended substance (body), which was completely and internally determined by the movements of itself (Descartes 1978). Descartes clearly had difficulties in attempting to explain how and why the question itself was misguided and could not be accounted for in any other way than in terms of a practical philosophy. However, the essential rationale behind his replies could be formulated as follows: As noted, the essence of mind, that is, that which substantially differentiates it from body/extension, is not, pace contemporary naturalists, the qualitative character of experience, but rather, as in the case of Bacon, reason or understanding (and the will). The first principle of philosophy, the attempt to see what one understands clearly and distinctly, what one knows infallibly, thus locates the formal, logical, conceptual, grammatical, structure of understanding itself. In itself, Descartes then claims, understanding (the formal structure of understanding) does not depend on or contain any notion of body or extension, whereas extension or body, as understood clearly and distinctly, i.e. as a substance, does not in turn contain any notion of mind, although it is the mind, and mind alone, which *understands* the essence of body/extension. In short, the mind-body distinction/dualism is simultaneously a conceptual, an ontological, and an epistemological, distinction because there is no way in which ontology could be conceived apart from the conceptual. So, while it is true that understanding (e.g. “*cogito ergo sum*” or  $1+1=2$ ) happens in extension or time and space, insofar as “Nature teaches” us through experiences of sensations (Descartes 1967a, p. 192) that we are embodied beings (we find ourselves in the world of extension), this does not mean, cannot mean, that the understanding itself is *of* extension/space or time, not because it is ‘beyond’ extension or above it, but because understanding cannot be *understood* in terms of extension/body.<sup>25</sup> Again, the inconceivability of a final explanation of mind-body interaction is an inconceivability of the interaction between the *essences* of mind and body; it does not arise because they *de facto* exist in two different ‘domains of reality’, but because the one cannot be understood, clearly and distinctly, in terms of the other.<sup>26</sup>

25 How long does the understanding of ‘I think therefor I exist’, or the understanding of ‘ $1+1=2$ ’, take? How far does it extend? Is the duration of understanding the time it takes to articulate the propositions? But is it not so that when I understand something I understand it at once? That is, if I understand that  $1+1=2$ , then my understanding does not equal my articulation of the proposition but is the understanding of the proposition. Could this not be a way of understanding the sense in which Descartes held questions about how the essences of mind and body interact to be confused?

26 Descartes famously claims that because the essence of mind (i.e. pure intellection/thought) and the essence of body (pure extension) analytically speaking are distinct, God can also have them exist independently of each other, although they do not do so in human beings (Descartes



Much of this will hopefully become clearer when we discuss Descartes' substance dualism in more detail below. Here I simply want to note the basic landscape in which the mind-body distinction is fleshed out, a landscape that shares some defining features with Bacon, and lacks some defining features with the contemporary naturalist mind-body problem. Now, the final quintessential element I want to draw attention to is the way in which both Descartes' and Bacon's conceptions of science/knowledge/truth, of the nature of the rational soul (the essence of mind), and the rational soul's relation to and tension with the irrational soul, or mind's (reason's and the will's) differentiation from body (nature), intertwines with moral-existential concern. For as we will shortly see, it is important to bear in mind that Descartes' mind-body dualism is intertwined with and gains its form from the search for infallible knowledge, and that the search for infallible knowledge is in turn intertwined with, and motivated by, the concern with the question why humans commit error and sin. For, as in the case of Bacon, the mind-body distinction is for Descartes internally connected with the way in which the fundamental concern of epistemology is not only with human formal fallibility or incompleteness, but also and importantly with the "misuse of the free will" (Descartes 1967a, p. 177). In other words, for Descartes, just as for Bacon, and, in an unacknowledged way, for contemporary naturalists, the mind-world relation is entangled with a mind-truth relation, which is in turn entangled with a mind-body relation, which in turn is rooted in a mind-*mind* concern or problem.

### Descartes' Mind-Body Dualism

In his *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (henceforth *Meditations*), Descartes allows himself, in *Meditation II*, to "consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement and place are but the fictions of my mind" (Descartes 1967a, p. 149). This bracketing of the 'external world' nevertheless does not, Descartes suggests, (conceptually) hinder him from pursuing his meditation and the search for infallible knowledge; bracketing the *existence* (not the *appearance*) of the 'external world' does not mean, conceptually, that one has managed to bracket all of *existence*. Continuing this logic, he soon then 'demonstrates' that the bracketing of *existence* cannot be made for thought itself,

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1967a, p. 190). However, it ought to be noted that such immaterial minds would exactly consist only of pure intellection and be deprived of the psychological life of human beings. That is, human psychological life, and the faculty of imagination, is not conceivable in terms of an immaterial, i.e. non-embodied, mind (cf. Alanen 2003).

that is, for the very act of doubting, imagining, willing, conceiving etc. One cannot, Descartes observes, conceive that thought does not exist as long as one is thinking.

What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist. I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks. (Descartes 1967a, pp. 151-152)

Thinking is, in other words, the proof of the *existence* of thought: *cogito, ergo sum*. This (tautology) then establishes the first principle of philosophy, that is, an infallible, self-evident, truth. It is something that we understand clearly and distinctly and thus secures that we do not, cannot, err in this matter. It is the solid ground upon which all knowledge stands. It is that which “alone cannot be separated” from that which exists (the I/mind/soul), and which does not need to “admit anything which is not necessarily true”. In short, it marks the first principle that can be understood solely by virtue of the “natural light” of the thing, thought, itself (Ibid., p. 160).

As we will see, this first principle of philosophy brings together, or is essentially entangled with, (at least) seven elements: (i) by uncovering the first thing/principle that is known infallibly, one (ii) locates the essence of mind, that it is a “thinking thing”, and (iii) demonstrates that the essence of body is not mind, that the two essences are distinct. Moreover, it (iv) uncovers the essence of body as extension, (v) demonstrates that while the essence of mind is existent the essence of body is (in a certain sense) nought, and (vi) provides Descartes with a structural or formal account of the nature of error and sin as privation, in relation to which (vii) he, nevertheless, attributes the source of the *actuality* of error and sin to the “misuse of the free will”. Descartes’ substance dualism ought thus, I will argue, to be understood in unity with the epistemological aspirations. And, even more importantly, the epistemological aspiration ought to be understood in relation to the moral-existential concerns that motivate and underpin the project of attaining certain knowledge. That is, it ought to be understood in relation to the concern with error and sin; with the question of

why and how error and sin have such a strong place in human life; why we are alienated or detached from truth, a truth that lies there open to us.

*Error and sin as a problem of the will*

For Descartes, to know an essence is to understand it clearly and distinctly; to understand it by virtue of the “natural light” of the ideas (in the mind) themselves. The essence of the soul or mind is thought. That is to say, the essence of the soul is the thought that understands its own essence; in understanding clearly and distinctly that the soul is a thinking thing/substance the soul understands itself as the very understanding that is clear and distinct. It is, in other words, by virtue of the natural light of itself that thought understands its own (first) truth. Or, put differently: the essence of mind *is* (revealed as) a clear and distinct thought of itself *as* a clear and distinct thought. The circularity of this reasoning is not (meant to be) vicious, but rather meant to point to the definitional, or grammatical, nature of the first principle. That is, in the understanding of first the first principle of philosophy mind or thought “turns on itself” (Descartes 1967a, p. 186)—not towards the world or body—and uncovers the meaning/definition of itself.<sup>27</sup>

However, if the essence of mind is a clear and distinct thought, that is, understanding, wherefrom then comes error, and sin? At least not, so it seems, from the essence of mind (its existence/being). Here is a central passage from *Meditation III—Of the True and the False*:

From all this I recognise that the power of will which I have received from God is not of itself the source of my errors—for it is very ample and very perfect of its kind—any more than is the power of understanding; for since I understand nothing but by the power which God has given me for understanding, there is no doubt that all that I understand, I understand as I ought, and it is not possible that I err in this. Whence then come my errors? They come from the sole fact that since the will is much wider in its range and compass than the understanding, I do not restrain it with the same bounds, but extend it also to things which I do not understand: and as the will is of itself indifferent to these, it easily falls into error and sin, and chooses the evil for the good, or the false for the true (Descartes 1967a, pp. 175-176)

<sup>27</sup> cf. footnote 3.

Descartes' definition of understanding is, again, a form of, what I call, grammatical observation—as is the definition of the essence of mind. Namely, that which we understand we understand: understanding *is* to understand. And, consequently, in understanding there is no error to be found, for if there is error then we do not understand. As Descartes explains: “For by the understanding alone I (neither assert or deny anything, but) apprehend the ideas of things as to which I can form a judgement [...] and though there is possibly an infinitude of things in the world of which I have no idea in my understanding, we cannot for all that say that it is deprived of these ideas (as we might say of something which is required by its nature), but simply it does not possess these” (Ibid., p. 174). So, Descartes holds, like Bacon, that although human understanding is limited, error does not, cannot (logically or grammatically speaking) stem from this limitation. Rather, limited understanding becomes ‘error’ when an unwarranted judgement is made due to the other essential attribute of the soul in addition to understanding, namely the will: erroneous judgement is the result of the will’s unbound and indifferent nature in relation to understanding. However, the will itself, Descartes claims, is “very ample and very perfect”, because it originates from God. Simultaneously, though, it is somehow also the very cause of error and sin. How is this to be understood?

The will comes from God, and everything that has its origin in God is perfect—think of Descartes' definition of God's perfection in terms of the definition of understanding: understanding means to understand, and cannot, grammatically/necessarily, ‘itself’ contain any error; it is thus ‘perfect’. God *is* the source and essence of all that has the natural light (the clearness and distinctness) of Being. However, it is a certain kind of necessary condition of human (embodied) existence that the will be much wider than the understanding, because embodied human beings are not, as already pointed out, ‘pure’ minds but are rather formed by a union between mind and body. So while human understanding extends only so far as it is possible for it to extend given its very nature, the will cannot, if it is to be free, that is, if it is to be a will at all (grammatical/definitional), be limited to what one understands, as this would entail the formal restraint or limit that one could not will what in fact would be *possible* to will, namely to form judgements based on unclear thoughts and without support of the methods of ‘practical philosophy’.

And though there is possibly an infinitude of things in the world of which I have no idea in my understanding, we cannot for all that say that it is deprived of these ideas [as we might say of something which is required by its nature], but simply it does not possess these; because in truth there is no reason to prove that God should have given me a greater faculty of knowledge than He has given me; and however skillful a workman I

represent Him to be, I should not for all that consider that He was bound to have placed in each of His works all the perfections which He may have been able to place in some. I likewise cannot complain that God has not given me a free choice or a will which is sufficient, ample and perfect, since as a matter of fact I am conscious of a will so extended as to be subject to no limits. (Descartes 1967a, p. 174)

An *embodied* human being is, one might say, both something less than understanding—as her understanding is limited—as well as something more than it—as her nature also encompasses things she cannot understand (clearly and distinctly). And, it is this distinction between the scopes of the understanding and of the will that *formally* makes error and sin possible. However, nothing in this formal setting necessitates or even persuades humans to make false judgements, that is, to either “deny or affirm” what they do not in fact understand clearly and distinctly (Ibid., p. 176). There is no logically necessary tie between (i) the formal *possibility* of doing/willing things beyond the understanding and (ii) the *actual* drawing of unwarranted judgements. For, formally speaking, there is nothing hindering each individual, when faced with things that are not understood clearly and distinctly, to simply refrain from making unwarranted judgement and instead openly acknowledging the state of affairs and carefully scrutinising and distinguishing what is understood and what is not, thus avoiding going beyond what is understood. —It is, to note, exactly this ‘sound’ relationship to ‘the world’ that both Descartes and Bacon want to (re)establish through the ‘new’ principles and method of knowledge they attempt to develop. In short, the making of unwarranted judgements, that is, error and sin, cannot be derived from the nature, essence, substance, being/existence, of the soul. Error and sin cannot be derived from neither the (essence or existence of the) understanding nor from the (essence or existence of the) will. For, while it is clear that error cannot formally come from the understanding, Descartes equally notes that “it is indeed the case that it is for the most part this will that causes me to know that in some manner I bear the image and similitude of God.” (Ibid., p. 175) Rather, Descartes observes, error and sin have their source in that humans simply do ‘in fact’ make false judgements.

But if I abstain from giving my judgement on any thing when I do not perceive it with sufficient clearness and distinctness, it is plain that I act rightly and am not deceived. But if I determine to deny or affirm, I no longer make use as I should of my free will, and if I affirm what is not true, it is evident that I deceive myself; even though I judge according to truth, this comes about only by chance, and I do not escape the blame of misusing my freedom; for the light of nature teaches us that the

knowledge of the understanding should always precede the determination of the will. And it is in the misuse of the free will that the privation which constitutes the characteristic nature of error is met with. Privation, I say, is found in the act, in so far as it proceeds from me, but it is not found in the faculty which I have received from God, nor even in the act in so far as it depends on Him. (Ibid., p. 176-177)<sup>28</sup>

Descartes' way of accounting for the occurrence of error and sin as rooted in a will that is (in its own essence) "very ample and perfect", is the introduction of the notion of a "*misuse*" of the free will; the privation of error and sin are found in the *act*. It is we, humans, who alone bear responsibility for error and sin; we humans *can* "misuse our free wills". Moreover, the "misuse of the free will" gains its criteria exactly from the way in which the use of the will comes in conflict with the understanding, or, as it were, splits the soul between the (use of the) will and the understanding. As Descartes informs us, in error and sin one, in some sense, "deceives" oneself.

It ought to be noted that, at least formally speaking, Descartes' conceptualisation or definition of free will in its entanglement with error and sin says, in effect, that truth is opposed to any 'positive' usage of the free will. That is, if, on the one hand, the condition of free will is that it spans wider than the understanding and makes it possible to act (make judgements) beyond or opposed to it, and, on the other hand, if error and sin are to be found exactly in this (positive/affirmative) *act* of the free will, then the only way to not *misuse* one's free will is never to act beyond the understanding, which is, never to act affirmatively upon that which makes the will 'free'. The only warranted usage of the free will is not to use it: "not My will, but Yours be done" (Holy Bible; Luke 22:42). It could also be pointed out, although it is quite unclear to what extent Descartes would even formally speaking agree to this, that this, so to speak, negative conception of the free will is a definition of responsibility. For what cannot be reduced from the 'freedom of the will', despite the fact that one can never act affirmatively upon its limitless scope with warrant, is that acting according to the understanding is something that is wholly our responsibility.

<sup>28</sup> Descartes continues: "I have further no reason to complain that He has given me a will more ample than my understanding, for since the will consists only of one single element, and is so to speak indivisible, it appears that its nature is such that nothing can be abstracted from it [without destroying it]; and certainly the more comprehensive it is found to be, the more reason I have to render gratitude to the giver. And, finally, I must also not complain that God concurs with me in forming the acts of the will, that is the judgement in which I go astray, because these acts are entirely true and good, inasmuch as they depend on God; and in a certain sense more perfection accrues to my nature from the fact that I can form them, than if I could not do so." (Descartes 1967a, p. 177)

We must, or ought to, act *as if* we were not free but simply dictated by the understanding. Yet *we ourselves must act*, and this act is wholly ours to bear. In theological terms, this is, as far as I can see, the similitude between humans and God; humans created in the image of God (Descartes 1967a, p. 170; Holy Bible, Genesis 1:26-27): "Ye are gods" (Holy Bible; Psalm 82:6; John 10:34).

It is, then, the conflict or strife between the understanding and the will that marks the defect, and the defect that marks the essence of error and sin. The philosophical/principal 'epistemic' mind-truth (mind-world) problem or concern, is, in other words, essentially entangled with a mind-*mind* problem, a problem of the soul's internal split and corruption. The kinship with Bacon's *Idols* is quite clear.

We thus have the following two components of error and sin: (i) the will stretches beyond understanding because humans are more than pure minds and (ii) error and sin arise when judgements are made in the domain of human thought that transgresses understanding (misuse of free will). To this we can now add a third component, which became apparent in the quote above, namely Descartes' claim that error and sin are privations or defects of being. As he explains: "the privation in which alone the formal reason of error or sin consists, [...] has no need of any concurrence from God, since it is not a thing (or an existence), and since it is not related to God as to a cause, but should be termed merely a negation" (Ibid., p. 177). Descartes inherits this notion of error and sin as privation from St. Augustine's metaphysics of knowledge and existence, who in turn inherits it from the Neoplatonist tradition (Menn 2002). According to Augustine, "every nature has its being through measure, number, and order, and must therefore always be good" (Menn 2002, p. 177). Moreover, "if every good were taken away, what will be left is not something [*nonnihil*], but instead absolutely nothing [*nihili*]. Yet every good is from God. Therefore, there is no nature that is not from God" (Augustine 2010, p. 71). Again, each step from the good or the true towards evil or error is not a step towards another nature or existence (*nonnihil*), but rather towards nought (*nihili*). Thus, in formal terms, insofar as humans do sin and err, their minds must be turned towards, bound to, something non-existent.

What then is the human mind bound to? The body, and substantially so. The mind-body union is the *formal* reason for the soul's contact with *nihili*. As Descartes notes, while there cannot be found anything in (the "clear and distinct" idea/thought of) God that would be the cause of error, "when recurring to myself [the embodied human being, not the essence of mind itself], experience shows me that I am nevertheless subject to an infinitude of errors", and concludes "that I [the embodied being] am in a sense something intermediate between God and nought", something "between the supreme Being and non-being" (Descartes 1967a, p. 172). Hence, we find that Descartes' foundations of

epistemology and his mind-body dualism are entangled with the notion that error and sin are privations, and that this privation, the nought, is somehow essentially connected with human embodied existence, that is, with the body. However, and moreover, we find, alongside or parallel to this formal structure of error and sin a, what I call, moral-existential dimension that locates error and sin fundamentally in the *act*, in the *misuse* of the will. In a formal sense, this misuse of the will, this self-deception, is a will directed towards or for the nought.

### *The existence of the corporeal world*

Descartes' adoption of Augustine's doctrine of sin and error as privation, and the notion of human beings as something intermediate between God (mind/soul) and nought (body), motivates Descartes' proclamation that it is "the body, to which alone we must attribute every thing which can be observed in us that is opposed to our reason" (Descartes 1967b, p. 353). Or, as he notes in his *Principles of Philosophy*, the "principal cause of error is found in the prejudices of childhood", that is, when the mind in its infancy is so tightly connected with the body that "it applied itself to nothing but those thoughts alone by which it was aware of the things which affected the body" (Descartes 1967d, p. 248).

What exactly qualifies (or rather de-qualifies) the essence of body as nought, as the formal essence of privation, as the 'matter' of error and sin? For, while body—the essence of body—is in some sense 'itself' nought (we will return to this issue in more detail shortly), Descartes goes through some effort in trying to demonstrate that *corporeal* things necessarily do exist, that they are 'something'. Let us take a closer look at Descartes' reasoning here.

The arguments for the existence of the corporeal world proceed in the following manner. (i) "[I]f it be true that they [different figures and such like, which one can conceive of through the faculty of imagination or the senses] exist, [they] must be attached to some corporeal or extended substance, and not to an intelligent substance, since in the clear and distinct conception of these there is some sort of extension found to be present, but no intellection at all." (Descartes 1967a, p. 191). (ii) The "passive faculty of perception that is, of receiving and recognising the ideas of sensible things [...] would be useless to me (and I could in no way avail myself of it), if there were not either in me or in some other thing another active faculty capable of forming and producing these ideas." (Ibid., p. 191) However, inasmuch as the essence of the soul is to be a thinking thing, Descartes' argues that this active faculty cannot exist in the soul in that "seeing that it does not presuppose thought, and also that those ideas are often produced in me without my contributing in any way to the same, and often even against my will; it is thus necessarily the case that the faculty resides in some substance



different from me" (Ibid., p. 191) Further, Descartes argues, this substance that is different from the mind "is either a body, that is, a corporeal nature [...] or it is God Himself, or some other creature more noble than body in which that same is contained eminently." (Ibid., p. 191) So far then, Descartes has argued that corporeal existence cannot originate from himself as a thinking thing/substance. However, this does not yet mean that corporeal things *exist*, that is, have their 'own' existence. For what Descartes famously still needs is the argument that God cannot be a deceiver; that the substance of the corporeal world is not simply produced in the faculty of imagination by a divine being, but by the corporeal things themselves.

Why then is God not a deceiver? As in other cases, Descartes' argument is what I am calling conceptual or grammatical. To begin with, the first principle of philosophy reveals to Descartes that the essence of mind is thought. Nevertheless, although thought (the essence of mind) formally, conceptually, contains its own existence and does not depend on anything else, this clear and distinct idea of simultaneously contains the clear and distinct idea/understanding that the very origin of the existence of thought, that is, the very origin or source of existence, is not internal to the first principle of philosophy in any other sense than as indicating that it is beyond the scope of the finite existence of the human mind. The first principle of philosophy only finds, as it were, the mind as *already* existing. The first principle does not, in other words, contain the understanding of its own origin. Or, as one might understand it, the first principle is not an *explanation* of anything.

The human mind is, then, both "incomplete"—it does not understand everything, including its own origin/source—and "dependent"—upon that which has created it, or in which it is sourced. Now then, following this line of reasoning, the clear and distinct idea of the incompleteness and dependency of the essence of the mind *means* that this understanding formally contains an idea of something complete and perfect, which in turn is, grammatically, by virtue of the same idea, attributed to that which is the source/creator of Being, namely God. As Descartes explains on two different occasions:

I perceive this similitude [between the essence of the human mind and that of God] (in which the idea of God is contained) by means of the same faculty by which I perceive myself—that is to say, when I reflect on myself I not only know that I am something (imperfect), incomplete and dependent on another, which incessantly aspires after something which is better and greater than myself, but I also know that He on whom I depend possesses in Himself all the great things towards which I aspire (and the ideas of which I find within myself), and that not indefinitely or

potentially alone, but really, actually and infinitely; and that thus He is God. (Descartes 1967a, p. 170)

And when I consider that I doubt, that is to say, that I am an incomplete and dependent being, the idea of a being that is complete and independent, that is of God, presents itself to my mind with so much distinctness and clearness—and from the fact alone that this idea is found in me, or that I who possess this idea exist, I conclude so certainly that God exists, and that my existence depends entirely on Him in every moment of my life—that I do not think that the human mind is capable of knowing anything with more evidence and certitude. (Ibid., pp. 171-172)

The idea of the existence of God is thus grammatically bound to the idea of a perfect being, which is in turn derived from the understanding of imperfect being: the first principle of philosophy clearly and distinctly shows that the *source* or *origin* of the existence of thought (which is certain) is beyond the comprehension of the essence of human understanding. Consequently, the existence of God grammatically also insures that God is not a deceiver, as there cannot be found any *cause* of evil or defect—which is what deception would conceptually be—in the idea of a perfect being, that is, in the idea of the good and the true—to the extent that one understands it clearly and distinctly. In other words, just as there cannot be found any cause of error or sin in (the formal idea of) understanding (or even in the formal notion of the will), God as the clear and distinct idea of the perfection and the good (i.e. existence) cannot itself contain any evil, deception, imperfection.

Now, then, we come to the *existence* of the corporeal substance. For having settled, to his satisfaction, that God is not a deceiver, Descartes proceeds to argue that:

it is very manifest that He does not communicate to me these ideas [the active faculty of the substance that differs from mind] immediately and by Himself, nor yet by the intervention of some creature in which their reality is not formally, but only eminently, contained. For since He has given me no faculty to recognize that this is the case, but, on the other hand, a very great inclination to believe (that they are sent to me or) that they are conveyed to me by corporeal objects, I do not see how He could be defended from the accusation of deceit if these ideas [the ideas of corporeal objects] were produced by causes other than corporeal objects. Hence we must allow that corporeal things exist. (Ibid., p.191)

So corporeal things do exist. Hence and however, there is a specific sense in which corporeal things are not equal to the essence of body, to the nought. Rather, corporeal things are, in some sense, like embodied human beings, something intermediate between God and nought, between Being and non-being. That is, if and because corporeal things exist, they cannot be thought of as simply pure body (nought), just as, although in reverse manner, human embodied beings cannot be thought of as pure minds/souls. The key here is that corporeal existence comes about when God, infinite mind, absolute existence/*nonnihil*, turns towards body, non-existence/*nihil*. Interestingly, this same ‘turning towards body’ marks the formal structure of the faculty of imagination, which in turn marks a difference to the understanding (the essence of mind/thought). Let us take a closer look at this.

*Body as nought: understanding the essence of body*

Before we can really grasp Descartes’ notion of how corporeal existence comes about, we must get a clearer understanding of why, and what it means that, the essence of body is nought. That is, before we move on to the corporeal world, we must ask what it means to *understand* the essence of body.

In *Mediation VI*, Descartes notes that “this power of imagination which is in one, inasmuch as it differs from the power of understanding, is in no wise a necessary element in my nature, or in (my essence, that is to say, in) the essence of my mind; for although I did not possess it I should doubtless ever remain the same as I now am” (Descartes 1967a, p. 186). And in *Meditation II*, where the essence of mind is uncovered, Descartes similarly notes: “I am not a collection of members which we call the human body: I am not a subtle air distributed through these members, I am not a wind, a fire, a vapour, a breath, nor anything at all which I can *imagine* or conceive<sup>29</sup>.” (Ibid., p. 152, emphasis added) As we have seen, understanding cannot be differentiated from the essence of mind—it is in understanding that the essence of mind is met with; it is internal to the meaning of mind. However, because in the *method* of hyperbolic doubt one can place in brackets everything that one is able to imagine without bracketing the essence and existence of mind, “it appears”, Descartes writes, “that we might conclude that [imagination] depends on something which differs from me [i.e. the essence of mind]”. It depends, of course, on body, insofar as “to imagine is nothing else than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing” (Ibid.,

<sup>29</sup> The translation is here misleading, as the original Latin does not have ‘conceive’ (which might be understood as ‘understand’) but only ‘imagine’. The original Latin term used here is *effingo*, i.e. to form an image, to portray or depict, to represent.

p. 152); in imagining, mind “turns towards the body” (Ibid., p. 186). In contrast to conceiving corporeal objects through the faculty of imagination, *understanding* things clearly and distinctly only results from when the mind “turns on itself, and considers some of the ideas which it possesses in itself” (Ibid., p. 186).

In *Meditation II*, after having secured with ‘infallible’ security that mind or thought exists, Descartes begins to contemplate as to the nature or essence of body; what is it about the body that he has a clear and distinct idea of; what is it about body that he *understands*? Descartes then famously turns his attention to a piece of wax in front of him. He begins by describing its different qualities, which are known to him through “the senses”, only to quite quickly acknowledge that “while I speak and approach the fire what remained of the taste is exhaled, the smell evaporates, the colour alters, the figure is destroyed, the size increases, it becomes liquid, it heats, scarcely can one handle it, and when one strikes it, no sound is emitted.” (Ibid., p. 154) He then continues with a queer question: “Does the same wax remain after these changes?” (Ibid., p. 154) For some quite unclear reason—what are the criteria for sameness here, and why are they so clear and distinct?—his answer is that it does remain the same; that “none would judge otherwise.” (Ibid., p. 154)

What Descartes is in effect suggesting here is that regardless of all the changes and variations the body of wax might go through, he nevertheless has a distinct conception of one and the same piece of wax. *Ergo*, whatever this distinct conception is, it cannot be due to the ‘sense impressions’, but must rather have its locus in something else. And now, Descartes makes a decisive move. He asks himself what it is that he is *imagining* when he forms his conception of body as deprived of any sense impressions. “Certainly nothing remains excepting a certain extended thing which is flexible and movable.” (Ibid., p. 154) However, whatever is movable and flexible “admits of an infinitude of [...] changes” (Ibid., p. 155), and as one cannot comprehend all the potential variations, Descartes concludes, “this conception [understanding] which I have of the wax is not brought about by the faculty of imagination.” (Ibid., p. 155) Interestingly, the same goes for “extension”, as the *imagining*, that is, the forming of an image<sup>30</sup> of extension also allows for an infinitude of variations of forms (Ibid., p. 155). And so, because the human mind is finite and cannot conceive of all the infinite variations, yet nonetheless has a clear and distinct idea of extension, understanding the essence of body as extension is independent of the images/representations one forms of the idea/thing.

In another example, Descartes makes the same point of contrasting understanding with imagination by using the case of two different geometrical forms: while we can understand, in purely mathematical/formal terms, the

<sup>30</sup> The Latin term in the original used here is once more *effingo*. See fn. 28 above

meaning of a triangle just as well as that of a chiliagon, we can nevertheless only imagine the former and not the latter (Ibid., p. 186). Hence, our understanding, our clear and distinct ideas of geometrical forms, is categorically different from our being able to imagine them. Or, understanding is not dependent on the faculty of imagination; the essence of the soul in no way depends on the faculty of imagination.

To understand the essence of body means, then, to comprehend it “naked” (Ibid., p. 156), deprived of all its appearances, as “withdrawn from all contact with matter”, as “purely intelligible” (Ibid., p. 171). That is to say, the essence of body is extension. Yet, to *understand* this essence is not to conceive of it as any particular form or appearance—image—given by the “faculty of imagination” (i.e. through the mind’s contact with the corporeal “animal spirits”<sup>31</sup> in the brain), but rather as “the object of pure mathematics” (Ibid., p. 191); as purely intellectual and pertaining to mind itself. Hence, in uncovering or understanding the essence of body, mind “turns on itself”—*not towards body*—and contemplates things it finds in itself; “things which were already present to my mind, although I had not as yet applied my mind to them.” (Ibid., p. 179) There is, then, a sense in which understanding the essence of body does not mean that mind finds, or understands, a body ‘out there in the extended world’. In fact, there is no thing, sense, or existence as the essence of ‘body’ to be found ‘outside’ or ‘independent’ of mind, for *understanding* can only uncover *ideas* that are contained in mind itself. Rather, in understanding the essence of body one uncovers the *idea* of the essence of body. Or put otherwise, the essence of body is an understanding of an idea (extension) in the mind. Thus, in uncovering the essence of (the idea of) body in the mind, (the essence of) mind finds an idea/understanding absolutely devoid of itself, its pure negation; in the idea of the essence of body, mind finds its absolute non-self. Again, in this sense, ‘in itself’ (the essence of) body is nothing, a no-thing. This might be phrased a bit differently: the essence of body is nought because body lacks any internal or independent perspective: independently, body does not exist ‘for itself’, *it* cannot “turn on itself”, nor does it understand, or perceive, anything else as existing. In ‘itself’, the essence of body is empty, devoid of meaning, of existence; it is absolute, infinite, potential of forms (variation) *for* mind. This would be, as far as I can see, the “natural reason”

31 Explaining what he means by the concept of animal spirits, Descartes writes: “nothing but material bodies and their one peculiarity is that they are bodies of extreme minuteness and that they move very quickly like the particles of the flame which issues from a torch. Thus it is that they never remain at rest in any spot, and just as some of them enter into the cavities of the brain, others issue forth by the pores which are in its substance, which pores conduct them into the nerves, and from there into the muscles, by means of which they move the body in all the different ways in which it can be moved” (Descartes 1967b, p. 336). One might thus characterise the animal spirits as that force which gives the body its dispositional characteristics.

(cf. Descartes 1967a, pp. 133-137; *letter of dedication*) Descartes provides for the (Neoplatonist-Augustinian) dictum that *existence* emanates only from God, that is, from pure or absolute mind/soul.

*Mind turns towards matter: imagination and the materialisation of ideas*

We have now seen why the essence of body is nought and, conversely, why anything that exists is solely sourced in the absolute, infinite mind/soul of God. This relationship between the *nihili* of the essence of body and the *nonnihili* of mind/soul is also essentially reflected in the nature of the faculty of imagination, that is, in the forming of an image; when “mind turns towards the body”.

As became apparent in Descartes' distinction between understanding and imagination, and in his discussion on the piece of wax, the essence of body is formless (or unqualified), an infinite/absolute potential of variations. Or, as Descartes notes, “body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible.” (Descartes 1967a, p. 196) More precisely put, body is absolutely divisible as it does not, cannot, ‘in itself’ consist of infinitely divisible *parts*, as ‘part’ already presupposes a form or unity/whole—both in relation to what it is ‘a part of’, and insofar as ‘a part’ always itself forms a certain unity or whole which singles it out as ‘a part’. Hence, it is best to characterise the essence of body as absolutely unqualified, that is, as absolute potential. In this sense existence or Being is *nonnihili*, as it is the undoing of, the qualification of, the giving of form/existence to, absolute potential.<sup>32</sup> So, none of the parts *as parts or units* of bodies pertain to the essence, the understanding, of those bodies, although the mind, when it turns towards body, can and inevitably will organise body/extension into parts and wholes; *form an image*.

Body acquires form, sense, existence, unity, only when mind turns towards it.<sup>33</sup> There is then a sense in which the human faculty of imagination (the forming of images) resembles, reflects, or bears a similitude to, God’s creation of

32 I must confess that it is a bit unclear to me how what I now say about body as absolute potential fits the idea of body, the nought, as the formal cause of error and sin. And, moreover, how this idea would fit with Augustine’s usage of *nihilo*. Perhaps I should simply say that as far as I can see, for Descartes’ thoughts about the essence of body and its relation to mind to appear somehow consistent, this is what one would be obliged to say.

33 It is worth noting in this context the way this picture fits quite well with the Baconian notion of reasons relationship to nature: nature is essentially the raw material for human industry. That is to say, Descartes here depicts matter/body as essentially potential for mind; as essentially something to be moulded, formed, manipulated.

the universe *ex nihilo*.<sup>34</sup> However, the human faculty of imagination—when the human mind/understanding turns towards body—is a kind of second order creative moment. Rather than the absolute thought/mind creating the world *ex nihilo*, the human faculty of imagination could be thought of in terms of an image forming an image—we are an intermediate nature between God and nought. In God's original creation the infinite or absolute mind turns towards the nought, the 'body', and gives form/existence to body (forms the corporeal world). Humans are part of this original creative moment in a special sense, for it is the human form in which the essence of the absolute mind or Being—God—is imprinted: in 'giving' humans a mind, God "placed his image and similitude upon [us]" (Descartes 1967a, p. 170). Humans were, in other words, created in the *image* of God (Holy Bible, Genesis 1:26-27). In turn, then, when the mind of humans turns towards the body, it has the similitude/imprint of the original moment of creation. However, it turns towards corporeal objects—not, as we have seen, towards the essence of body—that already have (*de facto*) existence. So unlike when mind turns towards itself in order to uncover the essence of body, which it finds to be a non-self, in utilising the faculty of imagination the human mind does not form images *ex nihilo* in the same sense as God did at the moment of creation, but rather deals with an already existent/created substance that, as we already noted, causes ideas in the mind.

However, our acquaintance with these (corpo)real objects are characterised in terms of what Descartes calls "real qualities" contra confused (or imagined) qualities (Descartes 1967a, p. 164), more commonly known to us, post-Lockeans, as primary and secondary qualities. The real qualities (shape, motion, size) of these real (existent) objects are not projections onto these objects insofar as they are reducible to purely mathematical abstraction, to pure ideas contained in or conceptually inseparable from the *idea* of extension. As one might put it, these qualities are given to them in the act of creation, or contained in the original act of creation; they are internal to the idea of extension/body. However, all of these primary qualities are for Descartes, as Stephen Menn points out, not "immanent in bodies" (Menn 2002, p. 384). That is, as qualities are in themselves ideas they must "be minds" (from the mind), while bodies are "nothing but matter" (Ibid., p. 374). What makes these qualities real or primary is not that they are there *in* the bodies themselves, but rather that they are not arbitrary or malleable for human conception (understanding *and* imagination) because they are primary features of,

<sup>34</sup> Again, it seems to me, we must understand the notion of God's creation *ex nihilo* exactly in terms of body as absolutely divisible, as absolute potential, as the unqualified absolute, which must itself be understood, i.e. has its sense, only in relation to the absolute Being, the absolute form or thought of God. In short, *ex nihilo*, I propose, ought *not* to be understood, as it were, in terms of a vacuum, but rather in terms of an absolute, unqualified, fullness (to the extent this is a better way of putting it) that is qualified, given form to, by God/absolute Being in *an/the act*.

or (in Kantian terms) conditions for the *existence* of bodies; they are internal to the, to God's, concept(ion) of extension.

The secondary qualities (taste, colour, sound, shape etc.) are, on the other hand, 'simply' contingent products of human psychology, of the mind-body union (cf. Descartes 1967a, p. 192). They are confused thoughts/ideas, which we *cannot* know clearly and distinctly. However, this does not diminish the importance or significance/meaning of the faculty of imagination. On the one hand, "although in approaching fire I feel heat, and in approaching it a little too near I even feel pain, there is at the same time no reason in this which could persuade me that there is in the fire something resembling this heat any more than there is in it something resembling the pain; all that I have any reason to believe from this is, that there is something in it, whatever it may be, which excites in me these sensations of heat or of pain." (Ibid., p. 194), while on the other hand, although the secondary qualities are and remain confused ideas projected onto corporeal things, the "perceptions of sense [have] been placed within me by nature merely for the purpose of signifying to my mind what things are beneficial or hurtful to the composite whole of which it forms a part" (Ibid., p. 194). In short, the secondary qualities correspond to the way embodied human life structures itself in accordance with nature, God's creation; although the danger here is that the factual secondary qualities formed in human psychology are taken as measure of "absolute rules by which I might immediately determine the essence of the bodies" (Ibid., p. 194)). So, while we attribute to corporeal objects around us all kinds of qualities that do not necessarily pertain to those bodies, and categorise them—that is, signify them as wholes and parts in different ways—in manners that do not (necessarily) correspond to any real truths about these objects, secondary qualities are not arbitrary but rather substantially<sup>35</sup> connected with the well-being of human embodied life, and it is ultimately this well-being, the good, which forms the epistemological core of practical philosophy and hence the significance of speculative philosophy.

### **Original Sin and the (Phantasmatic) Omnipotence of the Image**

One of the central points that I have been trying to make is that Descartes' mind-body dualism, and its associated cosmology, must be read against the backdrop of, not only the concern with *formal* possibility of fallibility, but against the moral-existential concern with the *act* of the misuse of the free will. That is

35 I use the term substantial here with reference to Descartes notion that mind and body form a real or substantial union (Alanen 2003, pp. 44–77; Broughton & Mattern 1978).



to say, I think that Descartes' mind-body dualism has two different, although intertwined, aspects or dimensions with respect to, let us call it, the ontology of fallibility.

*In its purely formal sense*, the mind-body distinction is a distinction between existence and nought. Moreover, corporeal (embodied) existence is itself a form of privation as it is the result of the mind or thought turning towards body (nought); God's imprint upon matter (absolute potential/*nihili*). This creation of the intermediate existence, including the imprint of mind upon matter in the substantial union between mind and body in the human being, structurally or formally means the *possibility* of error and sin, that is, that human embodied understanding is limited or incomplete<sup>36</sup>, while the will in turn lacks the bounds of the understanding. As noted earlier, that which makes error and sin formally possible is also the formal condition for human free will; the very condition for humans to be individual embodied beings. Nevertheless, in this formal or structural sense, the possibility of error and sin does not *necessitate* false judgements, error and sin. Neither does the finitude of human understanding and the confused ideas that stem from the mind-body union 'limit' *human* search for knowledge (and mastery/domination). Rather, this human condition simply calls for 'practical philosophy'. For the *formal* conditions of human fallibility and incompleteness directly reflects or manifests the will of God; it is good, humans just have to *themselves* align with it. So, once more, error and sin lack formal or structural *necessity*. Yet, it is there in human life, persistently. And, it is there solely because of a human, self-deceptive, yet 'free', *act*. *Not* to misuse one's free will is to *act as if* one was not free, that is, *as if* one was always dictated by the understanding. This *act*, this unavoidable *act*, is solely each individual's responsibility.

In this sense, the moral-existential concern in the mind-body distinction is, as with Bacon, about the tension or strife between mind or soul and 'truth'; a concern about the strife between understanding and the will (the *act* of misuse). Or; the mind-body concern is a mind-*mind* concern in the sense that the *actual* problem is internal to the mind/soul itself, and cannot be localised *in* nature/body or the structure of creation.

Now, I want to add a few things more about the relationship between the formal and moral dimensions of error and sin, and how the 'body' situates itself in it. First, it seems to me that the distinction between the formal and the moral reasons for error is to be understood as the distinction between mind-body and mind-*mind* strife. That is, it is only in a formal sense that error and sin concern

<sup>36</sup> That is, human understanding is incomplete in that one can clearly and distinctly understand that there are things one does not understand clearly and distinctly, the fact that the first principle of philosophy does not contain an understanding of its own origin being the first sign of this.

the strife between mind and *body*, while the moral-existential sense can only be captured as a mind-*mind* strife. So, when Descartes declares that it is “the body, to which alone we must attribute every thing which can be observed in us that is opposed to our reason; so that there is here no strife, excepting that the small gland which exists in the middle of the brain, being capable of being thrust to one side by the soul, and to the other by the animal spirits, which are mere bodies, as I have said above, it often happens that these two impulses are contrary, and that the stronger prevents the other from taking effect.” (Descartes 1967b, p. 353), this must be understood, as far as I can see, as part of a purely formal (or empirical) *description*. For although not all movements of the animal spirits (body) are “directly contrary to” the will and so “we do not notice any strife between them” (Ibid., p. 353), and although those movements that do happen to be contrary and constitute a *strife* between mind and body (or reason and unreason), this strife must nevertheless be understood, at least in formal terms, as part of (God's) creation, as part of God's will, and thus good in itself.

An essential aspect of the goodness of (God's) creation is reflected in that the strife between the will and the movements of the animal spirits does not itself *necessitate* the will to act upon the movements of the animal spirits (and e.g. make false judgements): the will is free *not* to *act* upon that which transgresses its own essence (what we 'really want') and the understanding (which is what we 'really want'). God has not *forced* humans to error and sin through the 'natural' strife between mind and body. Now, although Descartes does not say so straight out, it seems that this tension between, on the one hand, the strife between mind and body as part of creation and thus good (manifesting the will of God) and, on the other hand, exactly forming a *strife* in the human soul, indicates that the goodness, the God-given order, of the strife is a kind of just punishment—for an Original sin.

Now it seems to me that there is a double sense to this notion of Original sin, and that this double sense coincides with what I have called the formal and the moral-existential dimensions of error and sin. And, moreover, I think that one can find a certain discrepancy between these two dimensions as they come to play their roles in Descartes' system, and that it is here that we start to uncover the underpinning confusions or displacements internal to Descartes' self-understanding.

As I said, the *given* or natural strife between mind and body ought to be understood as just punishment, for an Original sin. Put otherwise, this natural strife is Original sin *inherited*: it is both inherent in earthly existence and inherited, in the sense that each human soul is born (embodied) into the fallen world; each individual *inherits* the fallen world.<sup>37</sup> Now, understood solely from

37 This dimension of Original sin as an inheritance is visible in for instance both the Swedish 'Arvsynd' and the German 'Erbsünd'.

the perspective of the natural strife between mind and *body*, the only way to combat unreason—which is here understood as identical with the (irrational) movements of the body/flesh—is to control and discipline the *body*. Earthly, secular, human existence cannot be whole or non-split, although Descartes holds, similarly to Augustine, that while the passions might sometimes be so strong that it “prevents the soul from being able wholly to control [them]” (Descartes 1967b, p. 352), “even those who have the feeblest souls can acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them” (Ibid., p. 356; cf. Augustine 1952a, book XIV). However, and despite the prospect of mastery, this understanding of the strife lends itself only to an understanding of a life of control and discipline. We are (justly) doomed to a strife. Or, as Augustine puts it, the need for ascetic mastery, while, according to both him and Descartes, a necessary and essential task in human life, “is not the sound health of nature, but the weakness which results from sin.” (Ibid., XIV:18, p. 391), as humans were created to be “spiritual even in the flesh”, yet “became fleshy even in his spirit” (Augustine 1952a, XIV:15, p. 389). Thus, Stephan Menn is surely right to suggest that although avoiding the theological reference to error and sin as punishment, Descartes “adopts Augustine’s view of the results [of Original sin], and uses it to describe the disease he is intending to cure” (Menn 2002, p. 318).

However, if the strife between mind and *body*, and its universe of discipline and control over the body and the passions, is tied to the *formal* account of error and sin, how is it with the moral-existential account, that is, with the mind-*mind* problem, the problem of the (misuse of the free) will? In contrast to the (formal/natural/inherited) mind-*body* strife, the mind-*mind* strife, the misuse of the will and the drawing of false judgements, cannot in turn be derived from, nor traced back to, the effects of the body upon the will. The will is free; our responsibility. In this sense, control and discipline do not answer to the challenges/questions of the mind-*mind* problem/strife. Moreover, the mind-*mind* problem/strife, the problem of the will, is not concerned with the *inherited* strife or just punishment, but rather concerns itself with the a-temporal participation in the Original *act* of sin, namely the misuse of the free will, which is the will's transgression over the understanding (which is what we 'really' want). In other words, the mind-*mind* problem is the Original *cause* of error and sin, whereas the mind-*body* strife is the *symptom* of this Original sin.

Now although I think that Descartes' system contains exactly such a distinction between, on the one hand, a formal mind-*body* strife and, on the other hand, a moral-existential mind-*mind* strife, I think that he nevertheless fails to fully appreciate, or acknowledge, this. The consequence of this failure is that Descartes seems to focus all his attention on the symptomatic, that is, on the mind-*body* strife, thematising his 'ethics' on discipline and control, at the cost of

losing site of the *cause* and actual core of the problem/concern, namely on what the problem of the will really is and what it would mean to actually take responsibility for it.<sup>38</sup> For as pointed out, the problem of the will seems not at all to be *essentially* connected to discipline and control over the passions, the movements of the body, but to something completely different. What this something else is, is something that I do not think Descartes sheds much light on, although I will try to suggest that some implicit, perhaps unconscious, indications are to be found in his writings. But before we move on to this, let me shortly still discuss a related theme, which also reflects or manifests the division (and discrepancy) between the formal and the moral-existential, namely the philosophically much debated theme of the *image*.

As we now know, error and sin depend *formally* on the intermediate nature of the corporeal world and the embodied mind in it. That is, it depends on, can only be found when, mind turns towards body (either by its own will or because it is effected by the body and thus turns towards it) and consequently forms an *image* in the mind. However, and as an aspect of the moral-existential dimension of error and sin, the danger or problem with the *image* formed in the mind cannot be accounted for solely by virtue of the imagery (the essentially obscure or opaque nature) of the image. As such, the image is just an image, although it might be in a 'natural' strife with the understanding and 'suggest' a 'fake real'. Yet, the actuality of such a strife only arises through the misuse of the will, when the mind makes an unwarranted judgement and the image now fails to be what it is, that is, an image produced by the faculty of imagination, and is instead taken for the 'real'; just as the shadows in Plato's cave fail to be, for the prisoners, shadows and are rather taken for the real things (Plato 1997b, book VII). It is as if, due to the misuse of the will, the image (of 'body') claimed the position of originator, the measure of all things, by referring back to itself, to its own imagery; as if it is the image contained, self-sufficiently, its own meaning, its own existence.<sup>39</sup> Again, there is a double sense to the misuse of the image here. On the one hand, the image formed in the faculty of imagination is taken as the real, while, on the other hand, this simultaneously means that the human being, as an *image* of God, yet driven by an urge "to live for himself" (Augustine 1952a, XIV:12, p. 388), ascribes the imagery of the human being to the real. That is, the misuse of the free will is exactly to think of the *human* will, although transgressing the bounds of the understanding (which is inherent to the imagery

<sup>38</sup> The same could be said about Augustine. See chapter V for more on this.

<sup>39</sup> This theme forms the centre pillar of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard 1994). Although I will not explicitly discuss Baudrillard's ideas, those acquainted with his work will recognise how the main claims of this thesis give a different 'answer' to the question of the 'image'.

of the embodied human being), as the measure of all things. The serpent's temptation "Ye shall be as gods" (Ibid.) is the denial that humans are made in the *image* of God.

Once again, although it might be true that the *image* 'tempts' us to false judgements, and that we need to constrain and discipline our souls not to yield to this temptation, the fundamental question here seems, nevertheless, to be what it is about us (our wills) that produces this 'temptation' and why we so willingly choose error and sin over clarity and understanding; error and sin over the good?

### **What is the Problem of the Will?**

Both Descartes and Augustine propose that the only way to assume responsibility for Original sin is to develop an increasingly stronger control over the body/passions; humans do not only toil for food, clothing and shelter (cf. Holy Bible, *Genesis* 3:16-19), but are in constant battle against unreason, passions. But what about the most important struggle of all, namely the struggle against "the misuse of the free will"? That is, what about our inert tendency to be drawn to unreason instead of reason, what kind of a struggle is this, and what kind of a problem or challenge is it? For if my analysis is right, it is the human urge ('free choice') to transgress the understanding that lies at the core of error and sin in Descartes', and Augustine's, cosmology, while the strife between the mind and the body or the flesh, is but on the level of the symptom.

How then does Descartes understand the nature and dynamics of the problem of the will? Not much is said about the issue, which, I believe, reflects the confusion internal to Descartes' philosophy. Essentially, his take on the matter comes to expression in the following paragraph.

But inasmuch as we know that all our errors depend on our will, and as no one desires to deceive himself we may wonder that we err at all. We must, however, observe that there is a great deal of difference between willing to be deceived and willing to give one's assent to opinions in which error is sometimes found. For although there is no one who expressly desires to err, there is hardly one who is not willing to give his assent to things in which unsuspected error is to be found. And it even frequently happens that it is the very desire for knowing the truth which causes those who are not fully aware of the order in which it should be sought for, to give judgement on things of which they have no real knowledge and thereby fall into error. (Descartes 1967d, pp. 235-236)

Descartes is surely right in saying that “there is no one who *expressly* desires to err”, if by this he means that there is no one who would, or could, *justify* their claims or deeds *as true* by reference to a will to err. The problem with this is, however, that Descartes seems to attempt to dismiss the possibility of (systematic and existential) self-deception hereby—which is, perhaps, an exemplary occurrence of self-deception. So, instead of considering the difference between, on the one hand, what one expressly gives as one's reasons and, on the other hand, how desire functions, Descartes simply (desires to) define the problem of the will in terms of 'unfortunate mistakes' that are done *in the heat of one's desire for truth*. What a strange desire this *desire* for truth is, if it is this *desire* for truth that in fact prevents or distorts our relation to truth.

One wonders how exactly Descartes wanted us to understand his claim that all of human error is fundamentally informed by the unfortunate mistake of the desire to assent to such things in which only *unsuspected* error (and sin)<sup>40</sup> is to be found? How exactly, one might ask, does Descartes for instance think that he can assert that, in a given case, error and sin are unsuspected, when the whole point ought to be, taken Descartes' own arguments, that what is and what is not an unsuspected error is something to be determined not *before* an investigation/clarification, but rather *after* it. Or, put differently, to say that there is unsuspected error and sin is not 'evidence' against self-deceit, but rather simply presupposes the lack of it. For instance, is it simply the case that a person makes an 'unwarranted' assent when he murders or enslaves another person, or that it is simply a case of "unsuspected errors" that underpin the lack of considerations for social- and environmental justice, the lack of genuine rationality, in our current political economy? Or, is it simply an unsuspected error that underlies the utilisations and theories of eugenics? And what should we think of the science of the atom bomb—which is to think about the whole institution of modern technoscience? Is the atom bomb irrational; does it stem from sound reasoning or is it mostly driven by the 'passions'? And, if it is in some ways unsound, was this unsoundness simply something we did not intellectually realise because it was not to be suspected? Moreover, if it is the case that our burning desire for truth is somehow entangled with such horrors, then what *is* this 'truth' that we desire? Is such a desire for truth perhaps a desire to 'possess' truth (power), to be seen as one that possesses truth? Is it not to some extent understandable that *such* a desire for truth would in fact be quite commensurable with the kinds of horrible 'mistakes' that humans make all the time? Is not the *act* of Original sin exactly the will to *become* like gods (power), yielding to the temptation “ye shall be as gods” (Holy Bible; *Genesis* 3:5), instead

40 It is perhaps no coincidence that Descartes in this context speaks only of error and not of error and sin, as he does in most other contexts, especially throughout the *Meditations*.

of acknowledging that we are already children of God, “Ye are gods” (Holy Bible; Psalm 82:6; John 10:34).

As said, I do not think Descartes provides us with any clear answers to these challenges. However, to end this chapter, I want to suggest, in a sketchy manner, that we can trace a sense beneath the (conscious) surface of Descartes' writings that points in the kinds of directions I suggested just now.

Although Descartes places feverish weight on the disciplining of the passions, it is nevertheless of utmost importance to keep in mind that the discipline of the passions alone does not suffice to bring about an understanding of the first principle of philosophy, upon which all other knowledge/understanding is to be based. What needs to be done is to have the mind 'turn on itself', and therein find or reveal the universal and metaphysical truths/ideas that pertain to mind itself.<sup>41</sup> So in order to uncover and develop the understanding, Descartes—like Augustine (who was one of the first to introduce the community-based or *cenobitic* monastic order into western intellectual and spiritual life<sup>42</sup>)—finds the fundamentals of truth and the remedy to Original sin in solitary meditation. That is, 'turning on mind itself' is not simply a 'spatial' turn 'inwards', but perhaps more than so, it is a turn away from 'the social'. Solitary meditation is, in other words, needed as a contrast to, is seen as the only possible contrast to, worldly, secular, *social* life, which in turn somehow, for some reason, strongly hinders the development or acknowledgement of understanding, and intensifies the passions.

I will give two short examples from Descartes writings that illustrate this. First, let us turn to the *scene* of the *Meditations*. In his *Discourse on the Method* Descartes pictures the setting in which he came to conduct his meditations the following way:

I was then in Germany, to which country I had been attracted by the wars which are not yet at an end. And as I was returning from the coronation of the Emperor to join the army, the setting in of winter detained me in a quarter where, since I found no society to divert me, while fortunately I had also no cares or passions to trouble me, I remained the whole day

41 In chapter V, I will argue that that this 'turning on mind itself' exactly manifests Descartes' (and Augustine's) misunderstanding of the problem of the will. But this will have to wait until chapter V.

42 The first monastic form in Christianity was hermetic, that is, individuals who withdrew from society into solitude. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it became customary that individual hermits formed loose groups, e.g. mutual weekly prayers. This custom formed into a new institution quite quickly and set the stage for the first Christian monastic orders. Augustine was one of the first to form a Christian cenobitic monastic order, at least in the Roman world. For more see Finn (2009)

shut up alone in a stove-heated room, where I had complete leisure to occupy myself with my own thoughts. (Descartes 1967c, p. 87).

We have here two elements that seem to have been central to Descartes' success in uncovering the first principle of philosophy: (i) seclusion from "society" and (ii) no cares or passions to trouble the mind. That is to say, it is these two elements that seem to be identified by Descartes as somehow attached to the motivational forces that hinder or are opposed to the development, or acknowledgement, and nurturing of understanding. But how strong or necessary is this tie? Let us begin with the issue of "society" or social life. We find an important indication in Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elisabeth. In his letter from the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1643, in the context of confessing how hard it is to contemplate thoughts "that occupy the understanding alone", Descartes informs Elisabeth: "That is what made me retire to the country. For although, were I in the most densely occupied city in the world, I could have as many more hours to myself as I now employ at studying, nevertheless could I not so usefully employ them, since my soul would be wearied by the attention required by the bustle of life." (Descartes 1978, p. 114) The "bustle of life" obviously refers to what Descartes in the *Discourse* calls "society", as living in seclusion in the country in now way lessens the 'toil' of embodied life associated with the natural appetites (needs), save those that are essentially connected to social or interpersonal life. So, while it might have been an accident that Descartes found himself in the stove-heated room, it seems that the tie between that seclusion and the production of the *Meditations* was not accidental but essential.

But how is it then with the "cares and passions" that might come to disturb metaphysical contemplation? Certainly, we might think here of cares such as health issues, or passions such as sorrows, that could travel with one to the seclusion of the country. However, it is not clear to what extent one can differentiate these from social or interpersonal life. First, if one would be overridden with passions such as sorrow, lust, uneasiness etc., it seems that these are more or less conceptually tied to social and interpersonal life: one, for instance, grieves the loss of a loved one; one passionately longs for a loved one; one is uneasy about one's social position, etc. Similarly, while the causes of health problems *may* be unrelated to social or interpersonal matters, for Descartes a great deal of bodily well- or ill-being is connected to psychology, as his *Passions of the Soul* strongly emphasises. Take for instance Descartes' diagnosis of the health problems distressing Princess Elisabeth: "The ordinary cause of a slow fever is sadness; and the persistence of fortune in persecuting your household continually gives you subjects for anger so public and scandalous, that there is no need to use many conjectures, nor to be accomplished in these matters, to judge that in this consists the principal cause of your indisposition." (Ibid., pp.



118-119) Elisabeth agrees with this identification of her concerns and the associated passions and indisposition as rooted in 'social life', and adds that she places much faith in Descartes as he wishes to cure her "body together with the soul" (Ibid., p. 122). She confesses that "although I do not place my happiness in anything that depends upon fortune or the will of men, and although I will not esteem myself absolutely unhappy when I shall never see my household restored or my kin relieved of misery, I will still be unable to consider the harmful accidents that befall them under any other notion save that of evil, nor to regard the useless efforts I make for their advantage without some sort of discomfort that no sooner is calmed by reasoning than a new disaster produces another inquietude." (Ibid., p. 122)

As said, my intention here has simply been to give some suggestive ideas of how the constitutive challenge of the problem of the will is, for Descartes, in some (at least partly unconscious) sense entangled with a concern with the dynamics of "society" or 'social life'. Moreover, one might suspect that this entanglement also involves the problematic '*desire* for truth', which Descartes places at the heart of the ethical-epistemological problem. For, whatever way we are to think of the appetites/passions and their hold on the human soul, they do not seem to explain why meditations on first philosophy demands *solitary* seclusion, while, on the other hand, detaching oneself from those disturbing, irrational, aspects of 'social life' to which one's will and desire is fraudulently attached to, does seem to require seclusion from, well, the 'bustle of (social) life'. In the following chapter I will attempt to make the case that we in Plato—more specifically, in Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*—can find developed the idea that the moral-existential problem associated with the mind-truth strife is in an essential way tied to a concern with, and a desire for, the social gaze and (social) affirmation, and that it is this (displaced) desire that marks or instantiates the basic split of the human soul and its alienation from truth or understanding. Although my aim is not to make any definite claims about either Plato or Descartes, I nevertheless present the thoughts of the following chapter as a way to understand the logic and dynamics of the mind-body strife, and consequently, as supporting my suggestion as to what might in an essential way inform Descartes' mind-body dualism, as well as the naturalist mind-body problem.

## Summary

I do not think there is any need for an overarching summary of the chapter as a whole. Moreover, the last subsection already to some extent functioned as a stepping-stone to the next chapter. So, let me just restate some of the main

lessons from this chapter, which I suggest we ought to keep in mind when moving to the next one.

One of the central notions I have tried to capture in both Descartes' and Bacon's philosophical outlooks, is that their respective mind-body dualisms are essentially entangled with an epistemological concern that is inseparable from a moral-existential one. That is, for both Bacon and Descartes alike, there is a kind of double source error and sin (the split between the will and understanding), and the strife between reason and unreason. On the one hand, there is the, what I have called, formal source, namely human finitude. Here it is the minds substantial entanglement with body (the pure negation of mind), which functions as the formal cause of error and sin, in that error and sin are, formally speaking, nothing but privations (of mind/existence). However, on the other hand there is, Bacon and Descartes hold, nothing *as such* in this formal predicament that can explain why it is that we fall into error and sin; why it is that false judgements are *actually* made, other than that they *are* made. There is, in other words, nothing in the formal account that *necessitates* false judgements. These are *acts* of the will. Moreover, the problem of the will (as the source of error and sin) in itself reproduces the incommensurability between the formal and the moral-existential (the *act*). Error and sin are *formally* possible because the will is much wider than the (finite) understanding of the human mind/soul (the condition for the will to be free). However, the *actual* reason or source of false judgements cannot be found in the *nature* of the will, as it is, in itself, "ample and perfect" and the formal differentiation between the finitude of the understanding and the limitlessness of the will is part of God's will, and so good. Once again, nothing *necessitates* error and sin. Instead, the *actuality* of error and sin can only be rooted in human *misuse* of the free will. In short, as far as I can see, Descartes (and Bacon, and Augustine) seem to be indicating, if not straight out saying, if only unconsciously, that the source of the *actuality* of error and sin cannot be found in any purely formal feature of reality, but must rather be understood in moral-existential terms, that is, understood in terms of responsibility.

Based on this identification of the two different and in a sense incommensurable accounts of error and sin, I have further suggested that these formal and the moral-existential accounts translate into a division between a mind-*body* strife and a mind-*mind* strife respectively. The mind-*body* strife, which reflects the formal dimension of error and sin and pertains to the *natural* and good/just order of God's creation, is to be understood as an account of the (just) *symptom* resulting from Original sin; Original sin *inherited*. The mind-*mind* strife, that is to say, the concern with the *misuse* of the free will, is, on the other hand, a concern with, an account of, the *cause* of error and sin; an account of the a-temporal participation in the Original *act* of sin.

However, despite the undisputable presence of this differentiation of the two different dimensions of error and sin, both Descartes and Bacon (and Augustine), arguably, invest their souls and intellectual energy in the *symptom*, rather than in the *cause*. As I tried to indicate, Descartes seems to be quite at odds, or straight out confused, when it comes to accounting for the logic and dynamics of the misuse of the will; accounting for the *sense* of the displacement involved in desire (for 'truth'). This (mis)identification with the *symptom* rather than with the *cause* pushes the moral-existential energy/economy intensely towards an (ascetic) control-discipline-domination-power orientated self-understanding. In terms of the *symptomatic*, the cause or object of error and sin is to be found in the 'other' of mind or reason, identified as 'body', which must be controlled and mastered. And, as shortly indicated earlier, while the object of discipline was, for Augustine, more or less restricted to the effects of the singular body upon the soul/will, for Descartes and Bacon alike the 'body' that is to be combated, mastered, and controlled, as it were, expands into nature as such. The task of the human mind/intellect is now, not only to master the singular body, but also to become masters and possessors of nature, of *res extensa*. —As Descartes argues, the essence of the singular human body in no (essential) way differs from that of the 'body' of nature as a whole: the task of mind is to master 'body' as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

All in all then, the main 'positive' lesson I want to draw from this chapter is the notion that the problem of the will, the constitutive disruptive and alienating element of human existence, and its entanglement with the mind-body strife, cannot be reduced to formal or 'natural' features of reality. And as we move on to the next chapter, the reader is encouraged to pay attention to the ways in which these entanglements also form the central pillars in Plato (more specifically, in the *Gorgias* dialogue), and/but how their meanings alter through the way in which (i) the nature of the will is understood, (ii) the way in which the problem of the will is understood in terms of *displacement*, (iii) how this displacement is linked to the struggle for (social) affirmation, and (iv) how all of this is intertwined with the good.

43 The difference that I point out here between, on the one hand, Augustine's outlook and, on the other, Bacon's and Descartes', is obviously a very complex issue. I say some things more about a certain feature of this difference in chapter V, but this amounts only to certain indicative observations. In one of my articles (Toivakainen 2018), I develop some ideas as to how the difference between the Augustinian and the Cartesian ascetic attitude reflects a transition into secular cosmology and how this is entangled with the rise of technoscience as the predominant secular form of knowledge. On these issues, one can find important and illuminating characterisations in Mumford (2010), Proctor (1991), and Taylor (2007).

## IV

### *Reading Plato's Gorgias*

#### Introduction

As indicated in the *Introduction*, this chapter is not meant to establish any expert claims about Plato's philosophy as a whole. Rather, as the reader will come to see, what follows is more or less limited to a reading of Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* (Plato 1997a; Henceforth referred to simply as *Gorgias*<sup>44</sup>), and, more specifically, *my* reading of it. Whatever merits this reading might or might not have with respect to Plato research more generally, is something I leave open and for the experts to decide. Throughout this chapter I will be suggesting and illustrating similarities between themes and 'arguments' found, on the one hand, in *Gorgias* (and perhaps in Plato more generally) and, on the other hand, in the mind-body strife and problem of the will as located by me in Descartes (and Bacon and Augustine) and, consequently, in the naturalist 'mind-body problem' or 'mystery of consciousness'.<sup>45</sup> The value of my reading of *Gorgias* lies, I suggest, in its potential to alter our understanding of the dynamics that inform the structural traits of the mind-body tension and the problem of the will.

Some remarks on the structure of the chapter. Since what follows is based on a reading of *Gorgias*, I begin the chapter with a quite detailed account of the dialogue itself. This account has a double function. First, it informs those unacquainted with the dialogue of its content. Secondly, and more importantly, it is not simply a report of the dialogue (although it is also that), but contains interpretive elements that frame the very way in which I suggest it should be read. That is, in addition to identifying the main issues and 'arguments' of the dialogue, I also identify Socrates' interlocutors' positions and arguments—

44 In referring to any passages from *Gorgias* I will use the standard reference style by Stephanus number, e.g. (448c), while in referring to other dialogues I will include the name of the dialogue, e.g. (*Republic*, 514 a)

45 There is, obviously, also an actual historical and genealogical lineage to be traced from Plato, through Augustine and Descartes, to contemporary naturalist philosophy of mind. This is, however, not what I want to pursue or make claims about. Rather, this chapter (and the thesis more generally) limits itself to the identification of (structural and other) similarities within and between these different 'accounts' of the philosophical problems or concerns with the life of the 'mind' and that of the 'body'.

namely their attempt to defend power and prestige over justice—as primarily construed as justifications for their desire to secure social affirmation. This identification centrally informs the analysis and diagnosis that I develop in the subsections that follow. In other words, although the reader might be familiar with the dialogue, it might be of some importance to nevertheless read through the account.

The second subsection begins my actual analysis and diagnosis. I start with some considerations on the nature of the will, and the famous Platonic claim—which can be found in Augustine and Descartes as well—that one always wills the good, and that insofar as one does not actually do the good, one does not do what one *really* wants. Here my central point will be that, for Plato, the will is internal to the discourse of reason, meaning, more or less, that the will stands in a kind of grammatical relation to rational justification: this is, as it were, the formal reason for why the final purpose of the will is the good. Continuing from these observations and suggestions, I move on to argue that while it is true that Plato identifies the appetites or the irrational part of the soul as a (formal) feature of the strife of the human soul and the problem of the will, this (formal) feature cannot, as in the case of Augustine and Descartes, account for the *actual* force in the human soul that displaces the will.

The central claim of the third subsection is that the main *force* of unreason/irrationality at work in the souls of Socrates' interlocutors is their urge and struggle for social affirmation, and that this marks a constitutive displacement of the soul and its desire. More specifically, the displacement here refers to a split or dissonance internal to the struggle for social affirmation, as this struggle is, so I argue, underpinned by the attempt to *secure* or *guarantee* the desire of the other, something that, nevertheless, is incommensurable with or destructive of desire. As I try to show, it is also—at least in the *Gorgias*—in relation to this dynamics of affirmation that the mind-body strife ought to be positioned and, furthermore, that the 'body' ought to primarily be understood as the *object* of the social gaze; the *object* that is (socially) affirmed.

In the fourth subsection I, as it were, reverse my sympathetic reading of *Gorgias* into a critical one and try to advocate for the position developed by Socrates' interlocutors, Callicles in particular. Centrally, I illustrate how the whole Platonic notion of reason and discipline as the means to a healthy soul *can* be read as informed by an ascetic ideal that, nonetheless, has as its ultimate aim the achievement of unrestricted enjoyment and the overcoming of impotence and, moreover, that the ideal of reason advocated by Plato is in fact ridden with *ressentiment*.

The fifth subsection turns the tables once more, as I attempt to show that we in fact have reason to interpret differently those elements that give rise to the suspicion that Plato harbours deep *ressentiment*. I begin this 'turning of the

tables' by pointing out that the position from which especially Callicles advances the claim that Socratic reason sides with 'slave morality', is in fact itself a fearful defence against the moral-existential challenge internal to desire. It is, in light of this, not Socratic reason(ing) that is slavish, but rather the interlocutors'. As I will argue for more strongly in the first part of chapter five, the attributions of ascetic and law abiding ideals to the 'healthy' soul ought to be understood as dialectical, or dialogical, ironic responses to the interlocutors' claims, and not as 'essential' aspects of the practise of reason. From here I move on to argue that if we understand the kind of elements that inform the resentment interpretation of Plato as instead concerned with conscience, then the pain and suffering that Socrates/Plato refers to as essential traits of the healing of the soul are to be understood as essentially self-inflicted, and not as vengeful phantasms. The subsection then continues to map out how the different concerns and themes—e.g. the problem of the will, the relation between reason and the good—discussed so far, intertwine and emerge in relation to the mind-body strife, as understood in the light of my reading of *Gorgias*. I conclude once again that at the core of this problematic we find, not an explanation or a cause, or a reason, nor a remedy, but rather what I refer to as a moral-existential challenge.

## The Dialogue

The *Gorgias* dialogue divides into four different parts. The first three could be characterised as Socratic dialogical exchanges<sup>46</sup> between Socrates and his three different interlocutors—Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles respectively. The last part differs from the three earlier ones in that it consists of a monologue in which Socrates gives an account of an eschatological tale. I begin by giving an account of each of these parts and then move on to the actual discussion I want to pursue.

46 The greater part of Plato's corpus is, as is well known, written in dialogical form, where Socrates is predominantly the main character. Throughout this and the following chapter I will say things that will to some extent inform the reader as to how I think one ought to understand the unity between the form and content of Plato's writing. Much has been written on this subject. In this respect I am perhaps mostly influenced by Vlastos (1991), Szlezák (1999) and Wallgren (2006).

## *Gorgias*

In the beginning of the dialogue we find Socrates, together with his friend Chaerephon, joining a gathering only to find that the “feast was over”, that is to say, that the talented and revered Gorgias has just finished his presentation. Encouraged by Chaerephon and Callicles, Socrates is nevertheless able to persuade Gorgias to join him in a discussion on or examination of the nature of Gorgias craft, namely oratory. From the very outset the reader is informed that Gorgias, backed up by Polus—who shortly takes part in the beginning of the discussion—thinks that oratory is “the most admirable of the crafts” (448 c). A bit further on, as the examination continues, Gorgias confirms Socrates’ suggestion that orators “carry out and exercise their influence entirely by speech” and adds that oratory is concerned with “[t]he greatest of human concerns, Socrates, and the best” (451 d); “with those matters that are just and unjust” (454 b). This exercise of influence by way of speech is then qualified as being a craft of “persuasion” by speech (452 d). Yet, unlike other crafts such as arithmetic, which persuades with knowledge, the craft of oratory, Gorgias comes to confess, results in “conviction without knowledge” (454 e). In other words, oratory is defined as a craft that convinces its audience about whatever matter it sets out to tackle without producing any understanding/knowledge of these matters. Moreover, the orators themselves need not possess any knowledge of whatever they are giving speeches about. In fact, Gorgias boasts, despite, or perhaps exactly because of its lack of any knowledge of different crafts (459 c), oratory “encompasses and subordinates to itself just about anything that can be accomplished” (456 b) and will be even “more persuasive than the one who has knowledge” (459 a). But what then about the orator’s knowledge of the just and unjust, which was what this craft was centrally supposed to be about; does the orator simply convince without or with knowledge of the just and the unjust (459 d-e)? “Or”, Socrates continues, “is it necessary for him [the orator] to know, and must the prospective student of oratory already be knowledgeable in these things before coming to you [...] Or won’t you be able to teach him oratory at all, unless he knows the truth about these things to begin with?” Gorgias answers: “I suppose that if he really doesn’t have this knowledge, he’ll learn these things from me as well” (460 a), implying that Gorgias himself does possess the knowledge of what is just and unjust and that he can teach others to be just.

But now Gorgias has brought himself into argumentative trouble. For in implying that (i) he does possess the knowledge of the just and unjust, and (ii) suggesting that he can teach this knowledge to others he (iii) comes in conflict with his earlier announcement (456 b- 457 c) that if oratory is unjustly utilised one is not to blame the teacher but rather the wrongdoer (implying that there are orators known to have misused their craft) since (iv) he agrees with Socrates that one who “has learned justice is a just man” and that “a just man does just

things” (460 b) and “[t]herefore an orator will never want to do what’s unjust” (460 c).

As one might note, one of the central features that brings Gorgias’ self-understanding of his craft into conflict with itself, when faced with a Socratic examination, is that he seems to be misidentifying or rather distorting, as it were, the grammar of justice when placing it at the very core of oratory’s concerns. One way to identify the conflict is to ask what exactly it is Gorgias thinks that makes oratory the most “admirable of the crafts”: is it its might of persuasion through conviction without knowledge, or is it its claim to deal with “the greatest of human concerns”, namely what is just and unjust. In boasting about the magnificent powers of oratory Gorgias proudly, and earnestly, sees oratory as “any other competitive skill”, comparable to “boxing” and “wrestling” (456 d). In this same instance he notes that just because someone knowledgeable in the art of boxing or wrestling “went to strike his father or mother or any other family member or friend [...] that’s no reason to hate physical trainers and people who teach fighting in armour” (Ibid.). And this surely seems to apply to the case of competitive crafts. That is to say, when the craft concerns a might, not the knowledge of justice, it is perhaps right to say that the teacher is not to be blamed for any injustice done by the student, since there is no claim that the craft (e.g. boxing) concerns justice or that justice has been taught. However, since Gorgias nevertheless claims that oratory, in its essence, *also* centres on the knowledge of the just—and its transmission—the analogy he ought to have drawn between boxing and oratory is the following. If a teacher of boxing claims to have taught the art of boxing to a student, yet when brought into the boxing arena the student reveals him/herself to be completely ignorant of the art, we should say that he has not at all learned boxing, and we might come to suspect that the teacher him-/herself lacked any true knowledge of the art. However, since Gorgias seems to be happy in saying that an orator can possess the competitive skills of oratory yet nevertheless act unjustly, his desire for oratory’s competitive might of persuasion through conviction without knowledge comes in conflict with his (urge to) claim that the just is at the core of oratory. In other words, Gorgias seems to want to characterise oratory by virtue of two different, opposing or incommensurable characterisations, namely as pure might or power on the one hand and as a knowledge of the just and unjust on the other.

### *Polus*

Polus, who now steps into the discussion irritated by what he sees as Socrates’ cunning method of leading people into contradiction, reveals to us the source of Gorgias’ blunder: “Gorgias was too ashamed not to concede to [the] further



claim that the orator also knows what's just, what's admirable, and what's good", for, Polus concludes, "who do you think would deny that he himself knows what's just and would teach others" (461 b-c). Gorgias' claim, in other words, that oratory possesses knowledge of the just and unjust, or that oratory even in any important sense has to do with justice, is in fact an insincere claim generated by a pressure—a 'social pressure'—to have oratory linked to justice in order for it to enjoy its admirableness and worth in relation to the customs of the social-symbolic value structure. This means then that what functioned as the sincere, actual, motivation for Gorgias' celebration of oratory was in fact solely its unique and superior power to persuade without knowledge: the power to do whatever one sees fit to do. In this sense, the rational inconsistency in Gorgias' account was due to the very way in which he attempted to fit his 'real' ambitions with insincere motives.

Polus, apparently unashamed to admit to this actual 'virtue' of oratory, starts to question, sardonically, Socrates' claim that oratory is a "shameful thing" (463 d), "a *part* of flattery" (466 a), and that orators are not "held in any regard at all" (466 b). Polus, on the contrary, obviously holds such a position to be "absurd" (473 a). For how could it be, Polus asks, that orators are not held in high regard when they clearly have "the greatest power in their cities" (466 b) and "like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the property and banish them from their cities anyone they see fit" (466 c). Well, Socrates replies, "if by 'having power' you mean something that's good for the one who has power", then "orators have the least power" (466 b), if, that is, orators simply do what they see fit to do without regard to what is just and unjust—as they, according to both Gorgias and Polus, seem to be doing.

Socrates does not question the orator's, or the tyrant's, ability to have things their way. However, he introduces a decisive distinction between *what one wants to do* and *what one sees fit to do*, holding that while tyrants and orators obviously do exactly what "they see most fit to do", they "do just about nothing they want to" (466 e). Hence, the stage is set: Polus claims that to have great power means that one can do whatever one *sees fit*, adding that Socrates "is just unwilling to admit it" but really "think[s] it's the way I [Polus] say it is" (471 e). Socrates, on the other hand, claims that the kind of power Polus is referring to is in definite contradiction with what one *wants*, and that Polus in fact—'paradoxically'—himself holds Socrates' position to be true, despite his urge to admire those who are able to do what they see fit to do.

The discussion then turns to an examination of the purpose or *telos* of human conduct. The theme is, retrospectively, well known to us, namely the proposition that we always do what we do because of the good, the benefit<sup>47</sup>, we think it will

47 It is important to note here that the notion of *telos* is to be understood both as the final aim and as the ultimate cause of human conduct.

bring about. As Socrates suggests, “[s]o it’s because we pursue what’s good that we walk whenever we walk”, followed by Polus consent “Yes” (468 b). “Hence”, Socrates continues, “we don’t simply want to slaughter people, or exile them from their cities and confiscate their property as such; we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they’re harmful we don’t. For we want the things that are good, as you agree, and we don’t want those that are neither good nor bad, nor those that are bad. Right?”. “I think it’s true”, Polus adds (468 c). And so the grammar of the good and the will, on the one hand, and what one sees fit to do, on the other, start to reveal themselves as not identical. For as Polus more or less is forced to agree, “it is possible for a man who does in his city what he sees fit not to have great power, nor to be doing what he wants [the good]” (468 e), since this person might simply be mistaken about the actual benefits of his deeds (468 d), and since Polus has happily agreed that if a person lacks “intelligence”, he will not be able to do the good despite his ability to pursue what he sees fit (466 e).

Now regardless of what discursive reason has revealed in the course of the discussion to both Polus and Socrates, Polus will not concede the case. He keeps on insisting that Socrates’ argumentation—to which he nevertheless has contributed to and rationally agreed to—is an absurd performance and that Socrates would surely in truth welcome the position of the tyrant, or orator (468 e). Socrates responds bluntly “Justly, you mean, or unjustly?” (469 a). This is a central addition to the discussion, for up to this point Socrates has not said that he doesn’t want to be a tyrant, only that insofar as being a tyrant only means doing what one sees fit it is of no worth, since the primary concern of humans should be seeking clarity as to whether or not what one does, how one lives, is (the) good. In other words, whether or not one is doing what one wants. Moreover, Socrates suggests that the introduction of the notion of justice is essentially linked to the grammar of the good and claims, to Polus’ bafflement, that “doing what’s unjust is actually the worst thing there is” (469 b). Consequently, we get one of the main ‘claims’ of the dialogue, namely that it is better to suffer unjustly than to commit unjust acts, and it is better to suffer just punishment than to escape it.

Polus is of course both baffled and irritated, thinking it absurd to deny that a tyrant who does what he sees fit and is able to escape any punishment wouldn’t be a happy man and to maintain instead that the one upon whom injustice is inflicted, or the one who is given a just punishment, is better off (473–480). According to Polus, Socrates is “saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain” (473 e), to which Socrates simply replies, “I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I’m saying, and that’s the man I’m having a discussion with. The majority I disregard” (474 a). Appealing to a ‘common’ understanding, a ‘common’ attitude, is of no value to the search for truth; the

discursive examination of the soul/will is, as one might put it, limited to the discursive practice.

Polus, firmly holding on to his conviction that it is worse to suffer injustice than to inflict it, and worse to suffer just punishment than to avoid it, is then asked by Socrates which he thinks is the more *shameful* of the two. To which Polus unhesitatingly answers “doing it” (474 c), hence drawing an essential distinction between what is “admirable” and what is “good”, and, consequently, what is “shameful” and what is “bad” (474 d). It is obvious by now that Polus has driven himself into rational inconsistency, as the craft of oratory has already many times been hailed, both by Polus and Gorgias, as the most admirable of all crafts (e.g. 448 c), more or less equating the admirable with the good. In other words, the downfall of this distinction is inevitable, since Polus does not in fact believe in this distinction himself, that is, since Polus does not mean what he says. Polus now proceeds to agree with Socrates that the admirable is defined in terms of “being either pleasant or beneficial [good], or both” (474e), and so “whenever one of two admirable things is more admirable than the other, it is so it surpasses the other either in one of these, pleasure or benefit, or in both” (475a). Likewise with the shameful: “whenever one of two shameful things is more shameful than the other, it will be so because it surpasses the other either in pain or in badness. Isn’t it necessarily so?”, to which Polus replies “Yes” (475b). Poor Polus. Having agreed to all of this it is not hard for Socrates to lead Polus, rationally that is, to articulate his own argumentative inconsistencies. For as Polus is forced to agree, what makes doing what is unjust more shameful than suffering it, cannot be due to the pain it generates, since it is rather the one that suffers the injustice that is inflicted with pain. In other words, what makes doing what is unjust more shameful has to be due to the badness of the unjust (475 c). And so, Polus cannot but rationally endorse the claim that it is because of the badness that “doing what’s unjust would be worse than suffering it” (475 c).

So is it with the case of just punishment as well. If it is, as Polus has agreed, more shameful to escape just punishment than to receive it, the admirableness of the just punishment must be due either to the pleasure or to the benefit it results in. A just punishment, like a medical intervention, is more or less guaranteed not to cause pleasure but rather its opposite, pain. So, the admirableness of a just punishment must be due to the benefit, the goodness, the justice, of the punishment, and surely not due to the pleasantness of it. Moreover, the good here is grammatically tied to a purification of the soul’s corruption (477 b), in that “one who pays what is due gets rid of something bad in his soul” (477 a). And what then is the craft, implicitly one of the most admirable crafts, to which one is to turn when in search of just punishment and the bettering of one’s own and others’ souls? Judges and the craft of judging are mutually identified by Polus and Socrates (478 a). And so the rest follows; Polus is in the end forced, rationally, to agree with Socrates that doing what is unjust is worse than

suffering it, and that avoiding just punishment is worse than having to justly “pay what’s due” (478 a). Moreover, because of this rational consent, oratory also appears in a completely worthless light, *unless* oratory is used solely for the purpose of always seeking to know what is just and to, if needed, always to have just punishment inflicted upon oneself and all those for whom one cares (480 c-d)—an understanding of oratory more or less completely in opposition to how both Gorgias and Polus have presented it.

### *Callicles*

I have constantly tried to imply that the agreement and consent, in a sense forcedly exercised from within and upon Gorgias and Polus, is a *rational* agreement and consent. It is not, as one might put it, a consent of the heart or of the soul, not at least a wholehearted one. For despite finding himself rationally agreeing with the argumentative or rational progression of the discussion, Polus nevertheless in the end retreats and is not really convinced, holding, as already mentioned, Socrates’ statements to be “absurd” (480 e). And Polus is not the only one.

Callicles, the last of Socrates’ interlocutors in the dialogue, now makes his entry by suspecting Socrates of dishonesty, since if what Socrates says is true then our human lives would “be turned upside down” and everything we do would “evidently be the opposite of what we should do” (481 c). The suspicion of dishonesty is motivated by Callicles’ interpretation of Socrates’ method of argumentation, which he thinks relies on Socrates pressuring his interlocutors by appealing to their “deference to human custom” (482 d). For what brought Polus to contradict himself was the very same thing that Polus accused Gorgias of. Namely, that out of shame for admitting to what was against custom, Polus drove himself, like Gorgias, to rational inconsistency by admitting that it is more shameful (although not worse) to do what is unjust than to suffer it and to escape just punishment than to suffer it. And by utilising this pressure of social customs Socrates is, according to Callicles, rather than pursuing the truth—which Socrates declares as his sincere motivation—“in fact bringing the discussion around the sort of crowd-pleasing vulgarities that are admirable only by law and not by nature” (482 e). For, Callicles continues, “While Polus meant that doing [what’s unjust] is more shameful by law, you pursued the argument as though he meant by nature” (483 b), something Polus himself was ashamed to acknowledge. So what Socrates has done, according to Callicles, is to dishonestly and mischievously reverse the order of law and nature. Or rather, he has identified the former with—reduced it to—the latter. In contrast and according to Callicles, “by nature all that is worse is also more shameful, like suffering

what's unjust" and "no man would", in truth/by nature, "put up with suffering what's unjust; only a slave would do so, one who is better dead than alive, who when he's treated unjustly and abused can't protect himself or anyone else he cares about" (483 b). —Keep in mind here Callicles' formulation, namely that what makes Socratic ethics the opposite of what Callicles thinks one should pursue is its helplessness, defencelessness, in the face of aggression and injustice; this will be important for us later. Continuing on, it is then these "weak" slaves that "institute laws and assign praise and blame with themselves and their own advantage in mind [...] frightening the more powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having a greater share, out of getting a greater share than they", thus labelling unjust "nothing but trying to get more than one's share" (483 c). "I think", Callicles concludes, "they [the slaves] like getting an equal share, since they are inferior" (483 c). In contrast to this 'slave morality' and its resentment, Callicles declares that in truth, that is to say, in accordance with 'nature', it *is* just for the naturally "better and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man" (483 d).

It is surely also in this light that we must see Callicles' earlier statement that if what Socrates says is true, it will turn everything upside down. For what Socrates' argumentative 'strategy' seems to, according to Callicles, be pointing towards is an identification of law with nature/truth, whereas Callicles sees law and custom as simply a perversion or disfiguration of nature/truth. The perversion here is, Callicles seems to hold, that the identification of law with nature—which is what Callicles thinks Socrates is claiming—is itself, secretly, a confirmation of a non-identity between law and nature and is itself underpinned by the driving principle of the will to power actualised, directly, undistorted, in the better and more capable men. In other words, Callicles is obviously aware of the fact that the great lot are led by law and custom, and so it would be strange for him to say that what Socrates is claiming would turn everything upside down, since Socrates is exactly suggesting what (Callicles claims) custom prescribes. Yet, since Callicles holds law and custom to be itself motivated by resentment, he is implying that people in fact 'live out' their constitutional "will to power", as Nietzsche (1968) would have said, the only way they are able to, namely by hiding their impotence in their admiration of justice by law. In other words, by adhering to law and custom the "slaves" are in fact living exactly in accordance to the same underpinning motivational drive as Callicles—the better and more capable man—only that they disguise and pervert this 'truth'. And even more to the point, despite of the social status of customs, each individual, and society as a whole, nevertheless in truth believes that the tyrant is to be envied: customs are but backdrops on the stage of the social theatre distorting the actual dynamics at play.

Hence, Callicles seems to recognise in Socrates' position something radical, something unheard of, something that he seems not completely able to position

into the frame of his belief in the motivational drive of our “nature”. For on the one hand Callicles ascribes to Socrates a genuine and effective talent in “crowd pleasing”, acknowledging, perhaps even with a kind of admiration and envy, the skills Socrates possesses, which, Callicles thinks, are in fact the very skills that orators are supposed to master. Seen from this perspective, Socrates is positioned in the very same game as Callicles takes everyone to actually be in, namely the game of doing what one sees fit to do. On the other hand again, Socrates seems to be saying things, and believing in them, which cannot really be placed in Callicles’ framework. For he seems to be inverting it, and with a certain rational power as well: Socrates construes an argument that claims that the individual’s will is fundamentally driven by something completely indifferent to and different from a ‘will to power’; as if we really wanted the just (‘by law’) for its own sake.

Callicles’ impulsive reaction to this strangeness of Socrates’ position and, notably, his whole way of life, is to label Socrates naive, childlike. In fact, Callicles thinks Socrates is quite embarrassing in his persistent pursuit of philosophy, something, Callicles claims, which is suitable only as an exercise for a young intellect (485 a-e). Socrates would do better, Callicles says, in moving on to ‘adult life’ and to start to concern himself with the affairs of the city and secure his position in it. For, as Callicles warns Socrates, he fears that Socrates’ manners will lead him to great danger in the city, especially when he is so unguarded. Socrates is, Callicles insists, quite vulnerable to the aggression of his fellow citizens because of his exclusive interest in philosophy and the just, and his disregard for power and security. This is arguably the strangeness of Socrates that Callicles cannot really place. Or rather, this is the strangeness that Callicles fears to fully acknowledge (more on this later). For unlike the resentment driven “slaves”—and the naturally more worthier individuals—Socrates seems not at all to be aspiring for power (at least not the kind of power Callicles thinks of) in the city and hence security and social affirmation, which is what Callicles in turn seems to praise as the most noble and worthwhile pursuits in life. Oratory, not philosophy, Callicles notes, would help Socrates secure a long and prosperous life (486 a-d). Needless to say, Callicles’ impulsive need to have Socrates adopt the ‘mature life’ and concern himself with the affairs of the city, reflects his own unease with Socrates’ strangeness and the effect it seems to have on Callicles’ own thinking; arguably the effect of putting into question Callicles’ own life.

Socrates suggests that Callicles is guilty of the very same thing that he, Socrates, is, partly, accused of by Callicles, namely crowd-pleasing. For as Socrates has come to note, Callicles keeps “shifting back and forth” in his attempt not to “contradict [his] beloved”, that is, his love for the “*demos* [people] of Athens”, which is what an orator must love (more than truth) if he is to accomplish his aim to persuade without knowledge (481 d-e). And why must the orator love the *demos*? Because in attempting to make them admire and affirm

the orator ‘blindly’, the orator must attempt to please/seduce the people to ‘love’ and admire him. Both Socrates and Callicles are, in other words, accusing each other of crowd pleasing—and manipulation—yet for different reasons and with different consequences.

However, Socrates also praises Callicles’ bold and upright affirmation of what he (seemingly) really thinks, in contrast to Gorgias and Polus. It is only such a soul, one that is free of shame, one that has the qualities of “knowledge, good will and frankness”, all of which Socrates identifies in Callicles (487 a), that can truly put the truth of Socrates’ claims and beliefs to the test. Yet, although Socrates surely believes in the absolute importance of these virtues for the search for truth, his ascription of them to Callicles is perhaps more ironical than serious and sincere. For given his earlier observations about Callicles’ character, the boldness of Callicles’ claims can just as well be understood as a form of crowd pleasing: now, finding himself in this particular assembly and context, Callicles sees his statements as welcomed and admired by the crowd/*demos* (at least Gorgias and Polus) and as a possible way of combating Socrates’ claims. Perhaps there is some sincerity and truthfulness to his utterances, but would he have uttered these words in another assembly, in another context, or would he have deployed another strategy, taken to other words and values, in order to mark his position as admirable—in order to convince without knowledge? At least given what Socrates seems to suspect about Callicles character, this is a very real possibility, one that will in fact be confirmed as the dialogue proceeds.

Now, after this initial stage setting the discussion then turns to the usual Socratic conceptual examination. To whom exactly, Socrates asks, is it that the greater share should justly belong by nature? And *what* should they have a greater share of? Callicles begins by identifying these “superior” and “better” individuals, as the “stronger” ones (488 c), only to withdraw his claim when forced to admit that it is in fact “the many”, and not the allotted (few) superior individuals, that “do have [the] rule” (489 a) and who lay down the laws and customs, and who are thus, by Callicles own definition (488 d-e), in fact the ones that are the “stronger”. And so Callicles begins again by suggesting that by “better” he “mean[s] the worthier” and follows Socrates’ suggestion that the worthier are “the more intelligent” (489 e), concluding that he means those individuals that are “not only intelligent, but also brave, competent to accomplish whatever they have in mind, without slackening off because of softness of spirit” (491 b). Moreover, these worthier individuals are the ones who are “intelligent about the affairs of the city, about the way it’s to be well managed” (491 a).

What then about the question of *what* these individuals should, by nature, justly have a greater share of? Obviously they should have a greater share in ruling; or rather the ruling of the city should exclusively belong to them, since they know best how to rule it. And, so it seems, it is this trait of the by nature

just rulers that also prescribes to them, by nature justly, a greater share in more or less every aspect of life, that is to say, in accordance with what they see fit (491 d). But *how* should one rule, and *what* should be included—over and above the ruling itself—in the greater share of the ruler? “But what of themselves”, Socrates asks, “is there no need at all for [the ruler] to rule himself, but only to rule others?” (491 d). Must not the ruler, Socrates’ suggests, be “self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself” (491 e)? In other words, Socrates seems to be implying the question: does not the knowledge of ruling and managing the affairs of the city well require a kind of internal/self-reflective knowledge about what it is one must rule over in others, namely that which distorts the understanding of what is good, reasonable? Against this Callicles unsurprisingly, and in a sense soundly, protests. For the ruler he envisions, the one who is by nature just, would never let himself be ruled by anyone; only slaves would do so in order to “conceal their own impotence” (492 a). For why, Callicles asks, should those in positions of power refrain from fulfilling all their appetites, when they in fact are free to unrestrictedly enjoy them, and instead bring “as master upon themselves the law of the many” (492 b)? “Rather” Callicles continues, “the truth of it, Socrates—the things you claim to pursue—is like this: wantonness, lack of discipline, and freedom, if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness; as for these other things, these fancy phrases, these contracts of men that go against nature, they’re worthless nonsense!” (492 b). Hence, the “man who’ll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not to restrain them” (492 a), since if the self-controlled man, who has “no need of anything” would be the mark of happiness, as Socrates’ seems to be implying, then, Callicles declares, “stones and corpses would be the happiest” (492 e). Socrates’ answers by inverting, as it were, Callicles’ suggestion; “Perhaps in reality we’re dead” (493 a). Perhaps “being dead is being alive” (492 e), and perhaps it is so “that our bodies are our tombs, and that the part of our souls in which our appetites reside is actually the sort of thing to be open to persuasion [i.e. a form of slavery] and to shift forth and back [instability]” (493 a). Perhaps it is revealed in Hades—the abode of the dead; or as Socrates’ says “the unseen”—that those who have let themselves be controlled by the whimsy and unstable appetites, are in fact “the most miserable ones”—when, that is, they are let loose from their tombs, into actual life (after ‘physical’ death) (493 b-d). As Socrates’ soberly anticipates, Callicles will not be persuaded by such suggestive talk. For what Callicles’ claim in effect seems to amount to is an identification of the good with pleasure, which, as Socrates’ straight on leads Callicles to recognise, would result in the claim that the person who has a persistent itch and scratches it throughout his life, is a happy person, given that scratching an itch brings pleasure (494 d). Callicles is, nevertheless, reluctant to give in to Socrates’ suggestive questions and in fear of “being inconsistent” (495 a) he goes on record saying that “*pleasant* and *good* are



the same, and that *knowledge* and *bravery* are different both from each other and from what's good" (495 d), thus resisting to discriminate between "good kinds of pleasures and bad" (495 a). *Ergo*, Callicles' absurd claim that the person who is forced to scratch an itch his whole life is a happy person.

It is clear that Callicles has already lost the battle, so to speak. For his whole earlier characterisation of the virtue of the "better" and "worthier" person rested on an identification between "intelligent" and "braver", which then in turn was linked to "pleasure". It is then no match for Socrates to lead Callicles, with his own rational consent, to his own inconsistency<sup>48</sup>. Here are the following central steps of the discussion. First, Socrates has Callicles agree that "every deficiency and appetite is [itself] painful" (496 d). So for instance, a person who feels thirst or hunger is in pain, while drinking and eating respectively is what brings pleasure. Even more strongly than this, Callicles comes to agree that it is only, say, a *thirsty* person who, when drinking, can feel pleasure. In other words, it is only due to, and only so long as, the deficiency persists that an appetite can lead to pleasure. So a person who drinks or eats necessarily feels, according to this reasoning, pain and pleasure simultaneously (496 e). Yet, Callicles has earlier (496 a-c) also agreed to that "it's impossible for a person who's doing well [good] to be doing badly at the same time" and so "feeling enjoyment isn't the same as doing well, and being in pain isn't the same as doing badly, and the result is that what's pleasant turns out to be different from what's good" (497 a). Likewise, whereas pleasure and pain come to an end simultaneously—as pleasure relies on a deficiency—the good and the bad do not (497 d). Moreover, Callicles, reasonably enough, also agrees that foolish and cowardly persons can feel just as much pleasure as brave and intelligent ones (498 a). Perhaps even more so, as would be the case in a battle: when progressing towards the enemy the coward would feel more pain (fear) than the brave man and consequently when the enemy retreats the foolish and the cowardly person would feel more relief, more pleasure, than the intelligent and brave one (498 b-c).

Being caught now in his own inconsistency, Callicles scorns Socrates for being so naive as to think that he, Callicles, could in fact mean to say that there is no difference between good and bad pleasures. Of course there are, he now declares, completely reversing his earlier claim (499 b) and confirming, together with Socrates, the notion of goodness as the human *telos*: we do the pleasurable because of the benefit or good it brings about (499 d-e). Well, then, Socrates asks, what is the craft by which one is to discriminate between the good and the bad,

<sup>48</sup> It might be pointed out that Callicles has in fact fallen into the lure of, or enacted, the basic fatalism of *tragedy*. For the inconsistency that he has now dragged himself into is a result of his attempt to exactly avoid it (see the paragraph above)—just as Oedipus' parents cause the prophesised fate to fall upon them and their son by attempting to avoid it.

since Callicles now happily agrees that as there are good and bad pleasures there must be a craft or knowledge, as opposed to a “knack” and “flattery”, by which to tell the one from the other (500 a).

Socrates begins this enquiry by asking what makes the product of a craftsman good as opposed to bad? Is it not the “organisation” of the object, its being put together in an “organised and orderly way”? “Yes”, Callicles answers (504 a). And is not such an organisation of the body what is called “health”, and illness the disorganisation? “It is”, Callicles continues (504 c). And the soul then, will it not be a good soul “if it gets to have a certain organisation and order” (504 b)? Callicles is still in agreement. So “what comes into being in the soul as a result of organisation and order?” (504 c) Socrates proceeds and (ironically) asks, is not “the name for the state of organisation and order of the soul [...] ‘lawful’ and ‘law’, which lead people to become law-abiding and orderly, and these are justice and self-control” (504 d). Callicles’ consent is, understandably, a more reluctant “Let it be so”, for was it not exactly law and self-control that he was determined to demonstrate were only for the slaves and not for the by nature justly admirable and worthy individuals!<sup>49</sup>

There is, of course, no stopping what must follow. Agreeing that it is only with regards to a healthy person/body that the doctor can rightly “allow a person to fill up his appetites” whereas “when he’s sick [the doctor] practically never allow[s] him” to do so, and consenting to the suggestion that as long as a soul is “corrupt, in that it’s foolish, undisciplined, unjust and impious, it should be kept away from its appetites and not be permitted to do anything other than what will make it better”, Callicles will have no choice but to agree that “to be disciplined is better for the soul than lack of discipline” (505 a-b). Or rather; Callicles knows he cannot but rationally concede to the argument, yet withdraws from the ‘voice of reason’ and tries to avoid consenting by declaring that “I don’t know what in the world you mean, Socrates. Ask someone else”, for he, Callicles, “couldn’t care less about anything [Socrates] say[s]” (505 c). Despite this retreat, Socrates is, with the help of Gorgias (506 a-b), able to have, the by now quite reluctant Callicles continue the discussion. Or rather, Callicles participates only half-heartedly, simply somewhat mechanically agreeing to the rational, grammatical, thread of the reasoning. And so Socrates suggestively (and ironically) asks Callicles if it is not so that the only admirable and good form of ruling the affairs of the city consists in attempting “to care for the city and its citizens with the aim of making the citizens themselves as good as possible” (514 a), that is, to attempt to have them organised and lawful, in turn requiring that

<sup>49</sup> Once again, I suggest that the emphasis on law and order are centrally meant here as dialectical ironic responses that derive their meaning from the picture of the good (life) that Callicles is voicing. For more on this issue see the following chapter.

the ruler himself possesses the knowledge and virtue of law and self-control. “Certainly”, Callicles replies bitterly, “if it pleases you more.” (514 a)

They now know, rationally, conceptually, or grammatically speaking, what the aim and purpose of ruling ought to be and what a human life must strive towards. Have there then, Socrates asks, ever been such rulers, or such orators, who have been able to make others better? As we might note, this is more or less the same question that drove Gorgias to his argumentative inconsistency when dishonestly claiming that orators can teach others to be just. And Callicles now also introduces the same type of differentiation as Gorgias did, between “those who say what they do because they do care for the citizens” (503 a) and those that are simply “bent upon the gratification of the citizens, and, slighting the common good for the sake of their own private good” (502 e). Perhaps it is so, Socrates’ continues, but do we then actually have any examples of orators or rulers that did not only allegedly “care” for the good of the citizens, but actually did make them, and the city, better (503 a)? Unable to mention any contemporary orators, Callicles brings up some names from the past who, he thinks, proved to be good men (503 b-c). Socrates does not deny that the names Callicles brings up were “better servants [of the city] than the men of today, and more capable than they of satisfying the city’s appetites” (517 b). Yet, if, as they have agreed, what makes a good ruler good is his ability to make the citizens better persons, then in “redirecting [the city’s] appetites and not giving into them [because the city and its citizens were/are corrupt (cf. 504)], using persuasion or constraint to get the citizens to become better, they were really not much different from our contemporaries” (517 c). As ‘proof’ for his claims, Socrates’ has Callicles reflect on how these former rulers were treated by their citizens; did not the citizens show themselves to “be wilder than they were” before these men took rule? (516). And did not these same citizens convict their leaders “of embezzlement” (516 a), “ostracize” them and have them “exiled” (516 d)? Callicles cannot but agree. And, if these men were, as Callicles says, good men, then they were unjustly treated. But since one who is just, one who has his injustice removed from his soul, that is, the one who’s soul is in a proper organisation and lawful, will never do what’s unjust (cf. 520 d), it cannot be that these fine rulers were in fact able to make the citizens better, more just, and hence, they themselves proved not to be (grammatically speaking) great rulers after all.

Despite all the arguments that indicate that the worst thing is to do what’s unjust and to escape just punishment, Callicles cannot let go of his concern for an ‘admirable position’ in the city that would ‘guarantee’ him immunity/protection against any injustice and prosecution. How can Socrates, seriously, think that “a man who’s unable to protect himself, is to be admired?” (522 b). Callicles thinks this despite the fact that he cannot bring forth a single “witness” (cf. 474 a), that is, a single rational justification/position, which would

counter what he and Socrates rationally keep agreeing on. —And so, to note, it seems that Callicles' deployment of the notions of 'by nature just and worthier', is underpinned by his concern for safety. So, when Socrates asks what "the craft by which we make sure that we don't suffer anything unjust" is, suggesting that it would require "that one ought either to be a ruler himself in his city or even be a tyrant, or else to be a partisan of the regime in power" (510 a), Callicles lights up. Finally, Socrates says something worthwhile: "Do you see, Socrates, how ready I am to applaud you whenever you say anything right? I think that this statement of yours is right on the mark" (510 b). But as Socrates gets Callicles to agree on, if one is to be a partisan of the regime in power, one will do well in trying to, not only pretend or imitate the regime and its customs, "but be naturally like them in your own person" (513 b; cf. 481 d-e)<sup>50</sup>. Such an attitude, which strives to preserve the individual's self-interest "no matter what sort of person you happen to be" (512 d), can surely make one immune to unjust treatment, but not immune to unjust action (510 e). Rather, one would more or less necessarily have to participate in the same injustice and foolishness as the regime in question exercises—because one would have to naturally be like the regime. Put differently, in order to secure oneself from the injustice one fears and wants to be protected from, one must become that which one fears, namely unjust. And so, Socrates observes, "[p]erhaps one who is truly a man should stop thinking about how long he will live" (512 e), since, as Socrates and Callicles have come to rationally agree, what makes a life worthy, admirable and good, is the organisation of the soul in accordance with lawfulness and justice. *Ergo*, the life Callicles is prescribing to himself and to Socrates is in fact a life in which one would not at all be protected against that which is the worst, namely doing what is unjust and escaping just punishment. On the contrary, it would more or less necessitate participating in unjust acts.

Let us add a few more observations here. Now if it is so that Callicles thinks that in order to achieve the good life, namely to secure oneself against unjust acts, one must "be naturally" like, *simulate*, the power, law, and customs of the regime (*demos*), he is, hereby, also admitting (unconsciously) that he himself is in fact slave to the other (*demos*), just as he thought any one ascribing to justice by law and custom is. In fact, Callicles is himself, so it now appears, ruled by the law and customs of the city (*demos*). This is the irony of Socrates/Plato's use of law and discipline as in fact internal to the grammar of the good, as derived from Callicles' claims/position, derived from his unconscious.

There is a moment here in which Callicles' internal conflict surfaces, as it were, sincerely. He replies to Socrates' reasoning: "I don't know, Socrates—in a

<sup>50</sup> One might say that the life Callicles' envisions for himself and thinks of as good, is one of *simulation*, in the Baudrillardian sense (Baudrillard 1994).

way you seem to me to be right, but the thing that happens to most people has happened to me: I'm not really persuaded by you" (513 c). To which Socrates in turn replies: "It's your love for the people [*demos*], Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me" (513 d). And this love for the people, is also, simultaneously, Callicles' love for his own (preservation of) 'life', his body—or tomb—and the appetites that move his soul back and forth. —We will return to this central theme in due time.

What then is the fate of the person who sincerely strives to become just, to become good? On the one hand Socrates seems to be implying, as we already saw (520 d), that if a person is just, and if he is able to remove injustice from the other's soul, that is, if he can rule justly, this person would not have any reason to fear being treated unjustly as those that are just always act justly. Socrates does not claim to possess the knowledge of justice nor the ability to make others just. The only claim to knowledge he makes is to the conceptual knowledge of the essential grammatical interlinkages between the good, justice, law and self-control, which no one has yet been able to witness against (cf. 527 b-e). Nor has he found anyone else with such knowledge and virtue. There is, in fact, reason to think that Plato discards a certain picture of the whole project of *making* others better, that is, discards the fantasy of control and manipulation, which is what the interlocutors are essentially aspiring for. For when Callicles warns Socrates of his *de facto* vulnerability with respect to unjust prosecution in the city, and when Socrates readily agrees that he will be completely defenceless if, and when, put on trial by the people of the city, he, Socrates, compares this scenario with a doctor's helplessness when trying to convince (with knowledge) candy hungry children about the ill effects of their diet (522 a-b). Here the doctor, analogous to the wise/good man, *is* one with proper knowledge, and yet he is completely helpless in that rational argument cannot as such turn an unwilling, undisciplined, soul on a righteous path. The question is then: what is it that is required for truth, for justice, to prevail? What is needed in order for the soul to become fully healthy? And, what is (meant by) the state of a healthy, a just, soul? This is where the deployment of the eschatological tale steps in.

### *The eschatological tale*

The dialogue has by now, as it were, come to its dialogical end. That is, Callicles, together with Polus and Gorgias, have not been able to produce any rational "witnesses" to counter Socrates' assertion that the good life is a life of lawfulness and order, that is, a just and disciplined life, and that it is worse to do than to suffer what is unjust, and to escape just punishment than to suffer it. Instead, Socrates' interlocutors have been reluctantly 'forced' to rationally agree with

Socrates—because the grammar of the good has in fact been derived from their own positions! However, their souls are nevertheless not “convinced”, as they place their desire for a secure and prestigious life in the city above justice, despite the normative lessons internal to discursive reason(ing).

The persistent concern voiced by Socrates’ interlocutors, to avoid the infliction of injustice and to be seen in a shameful light in front of the masses, has induced Socrates to refer to the notion of death several times. Who knows whether living is not in fact being dead and *vice versa* (492 e– 493 a); perhaps one should stop thinking about how long one lives and not be attached to life (512 e). Now, as the discussion with Callicles comes to an end, Socrates explicates the implications of the discussion in the following way. Instead of being afraid of death, which “no one who isn’t totally bereft of reason and courage” should fear, what one really ought to fear, Socrates informs Callicles, backed up by the arguments of the discussion, is “doing what’s unjust” (522 e). This is what the discussion has revealed to be internal to the grammar of the concepts in question and the *telos* of human action. But now, Socrates, that is, Plato, adds an extra dimension. For he offers as a *continuation* of the rational or grammatical conclusion a “tale”, one that suggests that “to arrive in Hades with one’s soul stuffed full of unjust actions is the *ultimate* of all bad things” (522 e, emphasis added). This then introduces the fourth part of the dialogue, namely the eschatological tale, which Socrates suggests is “an account showing that this [the ‘rational’ claims found in the dialogical exchange between Socrates and his interlocutors] is so” (Ibid.); a tale he “will tell you as true” (523 a).

Ever since the time of Cronus, Socrates begins, there has been in effect a “law concerning human beings” that orders those “who have lived a just and pious life” to “make [their] abode in complete happiness, beyond the reaches of evils” on the “Isles of the Blessed” (523 b). And while the just and pious reach heavenly bliss, the unjust and godless are in contrast ordered to “the prison of payment and retribution” (Ibid.). These latter individuals are then in turn divided into two categories; those that can be cured, and eventually brought to the “Isles of the Blessed”, and those whose errors are incurable (525 b–c). Now as the tale has it, in order to be cured of one’s wickedness, one must pay what’s due, that is to say, one must receive just punishment, as Socrates had already conceptually, grammatically, argued for and rationally justified during the discussions. Here we are not talking about any old punishment, but one essentially of “pain and suffering, for there is no other possible way to get rid of injustice” (525 c). As for those who are incurable, they will in turn undergo “for all time the most grievous, intensely painful and frightening sufferings” (525 d) without deriving any benefits from it. Rather, they are “made examples for others, so that when they see him suffering whatever it is he suffers, they may be afraid and become better” (525 b).

This law and order of Hades is overseen by judges, in whose power lie the final judgement. In the beginning there was nevertheless a problem, as people were wrongly sentenced; with some wicked individuals ending up on the “Isles of the Blessed” while some just and pious ones in the “prison of payment and retribution” (523 b-c). How come? Well, these misjudgements were caused by the fact that in “Cronus’ time, and even more recently during Zeus’ tenure of sovereignty, these men faced living judges while they were still alive, who judged them on the day they were going to die” (523 b). That is to say, the problem was that both the judge and the judged were alive. Now why was this a problem? While still alive, that is to say, while the soul still resided in the body, those that were judged were “fully dressed [...] in handsome bodies, good stock and wealth, and when the judgement takes place they have many witnesses appear to testify that they have lived just lives” (523c). To avoid this, the final judgement must be done only after the person has died, that is, after the soul’s separation from the body (524 b); when the soul is “naked” (523e). The nakedness of the soul, and hence the (dis-)affiliation from the body, is here tied then to two interconnected features. First, the soul’s nakedness refers to the deprivation of the body’s “adornment” (523e), to the riches and ‘beauty’ of the body that might mislead judgement. Secondly, the dead and naked soul is also a soul that is “isolated from all his kinsmen” (523e) so that those who judge “stud[y] each soul without knowing whose it is” (524e). Now these two features seem to be interconnected in that the ‘body’ represents or is identified here with a person’s social identity with the social position or status, something that is only recognised and affirmed by the social gaze. And so, the separation of soul from body leaves the soul in front of another naked soul (as the judge must also be dead, a naked soul).

As I already noted, Socrates, that is to say Plato, presents this “tale” “as the truth”. In the final moments of the dialogue, after finishing the eschatological tale, Socrates once more explains the use of the tale:

Maybe you think this account is told as an old wives’ tale, and you feel contempt for it. And it certainly wouldn’t be a surprising thing to feel contempt for it *if we could* look for and somehow find one better and truer than it. As it is, you see that there are three of you, the wisest of the Greeks today—you, Polus, and Gorgias—and you’re not able to prove that there’s any other life one should live than the one which will clearly turn out to be advantageous in that world, too. (527 a-b, emphasis added)

One might perhaps say that Plato takes the tale to affirm the same things as the conceptual examination did, and the arguments of the examination to likewise affirm the truth of the tale. It is, I believe, of great importance to our

understanding of the dialogue, and of the questions dealt with in it, how we understand the position of the tale and what is illustrated or (allegorically) represented in it. But this will have to wait until the following chapter, where I try to explain why the sense or meaning of the tale must be found in the dialogical exchange and not *vice versa*. Throughout the rest of this chapter, we will engage in a detailed examination of the central themes presented in the dialogue and try to link them, sometimes explicitly and sometimes more implicitly, to the mind-body problem and the things that have been discussed in the previous chapters.

### **The Mind-Body Strife I: The Will and the Discourse of Reason**

Having gone through the main arguments and high-points of the dialogue, I shall now discuss the different ways in which these arguments and the eschatological tale are interlinked with and can be placed in the main frame of this thesis, namely the mind-body relationship and its tensions. The analysis in the remaining part of this chapter will be divided into four sections, with an additional summary at the end. Each section will focus on different, yet interconnected dimensions, forming a kind of web of analysis, suggestions, and claims. This means that some things will be repeated throughout the chapter, in the sense that topics will be again and again revisited and brought together in new considerations. In the end I will try to bring this web of ideas and notions together in a summary.

This whole chapter on Plato's *Gorgias* is meant to develop a suggestion for how we might understand some of the basic moral-existential tensions expressed in the opposition and conflict between the 'mind' and the 'body', or the 'inner' and the 'outer'. In other words, my aim here is to try to develop an account or open up a perspective that will, in a sense, reformulate the idea of a inner-outer split and its tensions. Put otherwise, what I attempt to do here is to work through the ideas, notions, and claims I find to be of central importance in the dialogue and to try to trace their sense or meaning. This will mean going beyond Plato's own words, at least in the sense of what Plato explicitly says. All in all, this chapter will establish the starting point for the next one, where a new wave of analysis and re-articulation will take place as a response to the meanings that have been traced in this chapter.



In the first section of this chapter our central focus will be on the mind/soul-body distinction and dualism understood as a problem of the will, and as a strife between reason and unreason, or rationality and irrationality. Nevertheless, in order to get on the right tracks, let us begin with the notion of ‘the good’ as the human *telos*.

As we saw, the notion of the will’s perfect and good nature was central to the structure of the epistemological challenge and the source of error and sin in Descartes’ metaphysical system. However, although Descartes does give arguments for why it is good that we have an unlimited free will, he has little to say about what it means for the will to always want and strive for the good, except that it is good because it comes from God and that whatever exists, that is, originates from God, is good because there cannot be found anything but the idea of the good in the idea of God (as perfection). Now I want to argue that Plato’s *Gorgias* provides us with a somewhat clearer notion of the interconnection between the will and the good—and reason. Let us see if my suggestion can be warranted.

Alongside all the claims and arguments that Gorgias, Polus and Callicles end up reluctantly conceding, there remains at least one notion that did not receive any heartfelt objections. What never became a matter of dispute was the notion that one always does the things one does because of the benefits, the good, it brings. Put differently, there seemed to be no doubt, in the dialogue, that one always wants the good. What, on the other hand, did become a matter of dispute was the question as to what the good *is*, what it means to do the good. So when Polus and Callicles hailed the tyrant, Socrates did not deny that the tyrant does what he does because he *thinks* that this is beneficial for him—or, as I shall soon say, that he would give this as a reason for his beliefs and actions. Rather, Socrates denied that the tyrant is doing what he *wants* because he does not *in fact* do the good by being unjust (cf. Barney 2010). Instead, or consequently, the tyrant only does what he sees fit to do.

Now this distinction between doing what one wants and doing what one sees fit to do is in need of some clarification, not least because Plato has been accused of developing inconsistent arguments here (cf. McTighe 1984). For how, one might ask, can such a distinction be drawn if the basic assumption is that one always wants to do the good? The key here is—this is my suggestion—the essential (grammatical) link between the will, the good, and reason. That is to say, the conceptual or grammatical analysis elaborated by Plato seems to be that reason—discursive reasoning—and, hence, the will, cannot but vouch for the good, cannot but be orientated towards the good. What does this mean?

Think of what goes on in a Socratic examination. For instance, Socrates asks Gorgias what his craft *is*, what meaning it bears. Gorgias says that it is the

greatest of all crafts; that it persuades through conviction without knowledge etc. Socrates then comes with critical follow-up questions, asking his interlocutor to be more precise, to be clearer as to the meaning of the beliefs and claims. Going back and forth between the interlocutor's attempts at defining whatever they are asked to define and Socrates' critical scrutiny of these definitions, the interlocutor then paradigmatically ends up rationally agreeing with Socrates on views which are usually more or less contrary to whatever the interlocutor originally advocated. What Socrates' conceptual or grammatical examination then in effect does is to challenge the interlocutor to rationally *justify* his statements, claims and beliefs. Moreover, it is, so I would suggest, exactly this process of justification that binds the interlocutor's reasoning to the good, that is, binds reason to the good. For to justify one's claims and deeds *means* appealing to the legitimacy, rightfulness, the good, that these are believed to bear witness to. So, independently of whether what one does *is* good or not, one cannot but always *rationally* conceive of one's claims, beliefs, deeds, etc., as good (justified) *insofar as and to the extent that one tells oneself that one wants exactly these things*. What would it mean to say that I am doing *this*—I will *this*—because I think it is the wrong thing to do; because it brings only misery and no benefits (to me and/or to others), nothing good whatsoever? Would this not exactly be to give one's actions *no* reasons, no rationale, no justification at all.<sup>51</sup> Or, alternatively, would this not be to admit that one has completely misunderstood, completely deceived oneself, in doing what one has seen fit to do; admit that one has *not* done what one 'really' wants. Either way, the point here is that to *will* something is to conceive of it as good, as justified. Consequently, to the extent that one fails to give sound reasons for one's actions, beliefs, claims, there is no logical, no grammatical space left to say that one has done what one *wants*. Obviously, the central question here is what it means to give sound reasons, sound justifications, something we will discuss in detail later on.

My suggestion is, then, that it is the very act of rational justification internal to the use of discursive reason(ing) that binds reason, the good, and the will grammatically together and, consequently, that binds justification—justice—and

51 There are of course two different ways in which the question of the will enters here. On the one hand, there is the question to what extent the means that I am deploying really can lead to the desired ends, while on the other hand there is the question of whether I really can *want* the end I am pursuing. Now while the practice of rational discourse does extend to both of these questions, it seems to be clear that Socrates', or Plato's, primary concern is with the latter of these. As ought to be kept in mind, the good is here understood primarily as the ultimate or final purpose (*telos*) of human conduct. So the question that is pursued in *Gorgias* is not what kind of means are deployed in order to achieve what one wants, but rather the question of what the ultimate character of one's will is. In this sense, one might say that the Platonic idea of the good does not allow for any clear distinction between means and ends; the ends are in the means, in the sense that the means already reflect a self-understanding of the ends.

the good together. In other words, the very engagement of rational reason is grammatically tied to claims, or beliefs, about the good.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this means that the grammatical tie between reason, the will, and the good, is also and essentially a moral-existential tie; rational justification is not something one ‘simply’ does with one’s intellect, but something in which one invests, or attempts to invest, one’s soul. The point in Plato is, arguably, that one cannot differentiate between what is truly rational and what is truly moral, truly good. Or, perhaps even more to the point, in being asked or challenged to justify one’s thoughts and actions—asked to give them justified reasons—one is in effect being asked to take responsibility for what one says and does; to bind one’s soul, to the best of one’s ability, to one’s use of language and one’s deeds. This is, as far as I can see, what the Socratic requirement of sincerity, ‘say only what you sincerely believe’ (cf. Vlastos 1991; Wallgren 2006), essentially comes to.

So, to the extent that one fails to provide satisfactory rational justifications or “witnesses” to one’s claims and beliefs, there is, as noted earlier, no grammatical space left to say that one does or claims what one *wants*. However, as should be noted, all of this hinges on *the extent to which one agrees on the significance of being able to provide reasons*. This is why it is essential to note that the grammatical ties brought forth by the Socratic examination is possible only because people *actually* do enter into rational discourse (or the discourse of reason) with their souls. That is, it is possible only to the extent that people are morally-existentially tied to reason, and to the good. But insofar as one does enter into it (a Socratic examination), to the extent one is a *rational* being, there is no way out; to be a rational speaking being *means* to be tied to the good, *means* to have a will.

It is of course also central to note how everything here moves, as it were, in circles. However, rather than being a vicious kind of circularity, it exactly signals the *sense* of the grammatical tie—what a grammatical tie *is*—between reason, the will, and the good, in that all of these are internal to, or, as it were, acquire form in, the ‘practice’ of reasoning, in the discourse itself. As I already noted, the meaning of the ‘will’ is *internal* to the practice or discourse of reason(ing) and

<sup>52</sup> One might for instance think here of someone who professes to be a Satanist, in the sense that this person believes chaos and transgression to be ‘the real god’ or truth. Obviously, such a person might aspire to completely reverse the order of normativity, yet would not escape replacing it with a new one. The same logic seems to apply also to the *caricature* of post-modern theory; in claiming that ‘Truth’ is gone, that there is no absolute point in relation to which meaning is measured, there nevertheless remains the internal, unavoidable, normativity of reason. Namely, insofar as any such claims are meant to be taken seriously—to give us reasons to morally-existentially invest in them—they come with normative claims as to their rightness, and to their goodness. In short, the very engagement of ‘rational reason’ is ‘grammatically’ tied to normativity, tied to claims about the good.

hence grammatically tied to claims of the good. To be someone with a will *means* to be essentially, grammatically, tied to the good.

*The will and the resistance to the voice of reason*

Numerous questions and problems clearly announce themselves here. I hope that at least some of them will be dealt with in this chapter to an extent sufficient to help us gain some direction. Moreover, this whole chapter on Plato—and the remainder of the thesis—is an attempt to work with and (partly) work through the questions and themes that suggest themselves now. So let us continue without too much haste, and begin by asking how to describe the ‘misjudgements’ that Socrates’ interlocutors make.

At least two interconnected issues need to be noted. To begin with, there is a sense in which Plato suggests that Socrates’ interlocutors have misidentified, or rather displaced, the true object of their will because they lack knowledge. The central type of knowledge that Gorgias, Polus and Callicles seem to be lacking, according to Plato, is what I have called ‘grammatical knowledge’. Shortly put, they lack knowledge of what the good *is*; what it means, how it is essentially, grammatically, tied to some concepts (e.g. justice) and in contradiction with others (e.g. conviction without knowledge, the desire for social affirmation). This is the reason why they are unable to provide adequate rational justifications, that is, why they harbour internally conflicting ‘views’. It is, however, essential that we bear in mind that grammatical ignorance cannot be accounted for simply by reference to ‘intellectual’ ignorance or shortcomings. One central indication of the moral-existential nature of grammatical knowledge and/or ignorance is the way in which Socrates’ interlocutors so strongly *resist* the rational/grammatical outcomes of the discussion, outcomes that derive from their own claims, outcomes they have co-articulated and *rationally* agreed to. In other words, the issue in *Gorgias* is not only the *lack* of (grammatical) knowledge, but more essentially, the soul’s *resistance* to the voice—or discourse—of *reason*.

One might of course try to differentiate between the epistemic predicament and the resistance to the voice of reason in the soul by thinking of the latter as *caused* by the former. That is to say, one might suggest that the resistance, on the part of the interlocutors, to accept the rational outcomes of the discussion is due to the shame it would cause them if they conceded the case to Socrates after having being beaten in argumentation. In this picture the beliefs held by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, before being scrutinised by Socrates, would be more or less ‘innocent’ epistemic blunders or misjudgements made in good faith. It is only when they have been shown to in fact harbour inconsistent beliefs that these, in principle good-willing individuals, resist reason because they are ashamed of

admitting their purely intellectual blunder, that is, to be seen in an unfavourable light (but what would make it *unfavourable*?). But such a picture, it seems to me, fails to appreciate the depths of the essential tie between epistemic failure and the corruption of the soul (ethics) that Plato aspires to develop, to articulate, to reveal.

Here is the situation once more: Socrates' interlocutors harbour beliefs that they themselves, in agreement with their own announcements, cannot rationally justify. However, they are not ready to accept what reason prescribes. Rather, they think that the 'conclusions' they have arrived at together with Socrates are absurd. In short, the resistance to the voice of reason means that they have to suppress their 'rational part' in order to keep on binding their souls to those 'irrational' desires that they are existentially bent on. It is not, then, only that the interlocutors shy away from the voice of reason because they are ashamed of being seen as the 'losers' of the debate.<sup>53</sup> Rather, it seems that the resistance to, and suppression of, the voice of reason is a trace or a sign of the constitutive grammatical failure itself. That is to say, the point Plato seems to be making is that the resistance to reason, the suppression of the rational part, is the source of why Socrates' interlocutors started developing and deploying, in the first place, the claims they give voice to throughout the dialogue. There is no distinction made, in *Gorgias*, between epistemic (grammatical) failure and the corruption or dissonance of the soul.

This becomes even more evident when we reflect upon the (false) rational justifications the interlocutors try to advance. For what Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles all in effect are promoting, and aspire to convince Socrates of, is that manipulation, cunningness, etc., are virtues that a human being should aspire to—in order to secure that no injustice be inflicted upon oneself and one's loved ones; to secure that one does not suffer *humiliation* by becoming, either oneself or one's near and dear, victims of unjust acts. Yet, as they come to admit, their desire for this security comes with the imminent and perhaps even unavoidable risk of doing what is unjust, which they again cannot but *rationally* hold to be the worst thing. The important thing here is of course that the price of their urge for such security comes as no surprise to them: they know quite well the extent to which one must be prepared to go in order to secure oneself from the infliction of injustice and thus humiliation. As they themselves come to admit, the type of ruling they aspire for is one that cares more for their own security, for their own reputation, than for justice. Moreover, as we will see in more detail later on, the

<sup>53</sup> In fact, shame seems to pin them to the normative claims the discussion ends up rationally vouching for; this is the case with Gorgias, Polus, and also with Callicles. Moreover, as I indicated in the preceding section, it is part of Socrates/Plato's ironic response to the interlocutors to reveal to them that they are all in fact driven by a slavish 'love' for the laws and customs of society (cf. the first section of this chapter, especially the part on Callicles).

interlocutors' desire for security over and above justice contains the following 'paradox': in order to secure themselves from the aggressivity and injustice they anticipate becoming victims of, they must become that which they fear, namely unjust: it is as if injustice was the reason for itself—which is perhaps exactly what it always is. In other words, the rational inconsistency of the interlocutors is tied to a desire, to a displacement of will-desire<sup>54</sup>.

Let me once more point out that the *desire* for that which is in conflict with reason, the good, could be said to have no real place in the will; it does not derive from the will, from reason. However, to the extent that humans are speaking, rational beings, to the extent that they have a will, 'irrational desires', the 'misuse of the will', is, nevertheless, inevitably bound to a *misuse of reason*. This is an important feature. For what it suggests is that rational, willing beings are, so to speak, forced to utilise reason to (falsely) justify to themselves—to their 'rational part'—and to others, what they desire but cannot (rationally) want—which says something essential about how the term 'rational' is to be understood in Platonic terms. In other words, rational beings, in order to pursue a desire connected with e.g. injustice, must rationally justify these (displaced) desires while simultaneously suppressing or resisting the voice of reason—and explicitly so when faced with a Socratic examination. This conflicting stance, which an unjust soul must 'uphold', is, I suggest, the expression of the dissonance of the soul. I will return to this issue later on.

So, to state it once more, my suggestion is that Plato holds the suppression of 'the rational part of the soul' to be a suppression that has been constitutive of the very formation of the dissonant beliefs the interlocutors bring to the discussion. The epistemological (grammatical) and the moral-existential are, in this sense, inseparable.

### *The will, reason and the appetites*

Referring to something he once heard from a wise man, Socrates suggests that "the part of our souls in which our appetites resides is actually the sort of thing to be open to persuasion and to shift back and forth" (493a). By this reference, Plato indicates that it is this part of the soul that pays no heed to knowledge—it is persuaded without knowledge (the thing the craft of oratory depends on!)—which means that this part of the soul is the undisciplined, the unstable, part (493b). In short, the part of the soul in which the appetites reside connects, *in some way*, to the suppression of or resistance to the rational part. This might

<sup>54</sup> I will use this term 'will-desire' every now and then when speaking of the idea of what one 'really' wants, that is, of desire that is *not* displaced.

perhaps be put in Cartesian terms by saying that when the will transgresses the domain of knowledge/understanding, it transgresses the domain of discipline by reason and ends up being guided by the appetites and pleasures (or as Descartes calls them, the passions of the soul). This is the case with Gorgias, Polus, and especially Callicles; they (necessarily) will the good, yet do not do what (do not live as) they want, as they misidentify or displace the good—their will—as the fulfilment of appetites and pleasures. As we saw in the discussion between Socrates and Callicles, Callicles agrees that the pleasurable—the way he, *Callicles*, deploys the concept of pleasure—is completely dependent upon its opposite (pain), as one can feel pleasure only as long as one also feels pain and as both come to an end simultaneously, while the good and the bad do not have this kind of grammatical relationship.<sup>55</sup> Hence, Callicles is forced to agree; the good is not identical or connected with the pleasurable in the same way as for instance justice and self-control are. In short, in placing—dishonestly!—the fulfilment of the appetites as the central way to the good, Socrates' interlocutors are heading towards an endless pursuit of the unattainable: the good as the pleasurable (in the sense Callicles thinks of it).

So, the part of the soul in which the appetites reside is somehow interlinked with the soul's resistance to the rational part. However, it is important that we see exactly what this link is. The appetites reside in a *part* of the soul. That is to say, appetites are not some external force that mysteriously affects the soul. Rather, the appetites are *internal* to the soul; they reside in a part of the soul that is open to persuasion.<sup>56</sup> Having said this, we need to simultaneously note that although Plato divides the soul into a rational and an irrational part, the actual conflict or dissonance of the soul *is not due to or founded on this division*. Or, more to precisely, the *cause* of the conflict or dissonance of the soul cannot be traced back to the 'irrationality' of the appetites. For while it might be that a soul that is 'guided by the appetites' is one doomed not to do what it wants, the appetites themselves, or the part of the soul in which they reside, are not in any absolute or independent sense depicted as bad or corrupt. Or perhaps better put; the appetites do not necessarily have to make the soul's willing corrupt, displaced, even if the soul does in fact fulfil its appetites. Rather, as we can observe in *Gorgias*, the problem only arises when the soul is 'unhealthy' and 'disorderly', 'unlawful' (cf. 504c-d), that is, when one allows the appetites to irrationally *rule*

<sup>55</sup> To re-emphasise, this line of argument is internal to the way in which Callicles is ready to identify what he wants to mean by 'pleasure'. This is not how one 'must' think of pleasure.

<sup>56</sup> Note here already that the irrational soul is simply identified as open to persuasion. That is, it is just as open to be persuaded by reason as by unreason. The problem with the appetites seem to be that they, as such, do not have a will, that is, they do not have any concern for the (meaning of the) good, only for their 'own immediate objects'.

the soul. Conversely, then, for a “healthy” soul, for a soul disciplined<sup>57</sup> by rational reason, enjoying one’s appetites is not a problem as one enjoys them orderly, in accordance with reason, in accordance with the good. Such fulfilment of appetites and pleasures can, in other words, be rationally justified without contradictions: “Now, isn’t it also true that doctors generally allow a person to fill up his appetites [...] as much as he wants to when he’s in good health, but when he’s sick they practically never allow him to fill himself with what he has an appetite for?” (505 a)

My suggestion is, then, that we find in Plato (or more precisely, in *Gorgias*) a similar distinction between the *symptom* and the *cause* of error and sin as in Descartes, Bacon, and Augustine. So, in terms of a *formal, symptomatic*, order, the dissonance or split of the soul is tied to a division between reason and unreason, and the latter to the appetites, while the *actual cause* must be differently. Although Plato does not, of course, operate with the *Christian* notion of Original sin, he indicates that there is something internal to—something constitutive of and indistinguishable from—the soul that *seems to desire*, if not to will, the irrational, the unjust, sin—and that this *cause* falls upon our own responsibility. Put otherwise, Plato seems to acknowledge that the source of the corruption of the soul cannot be found anywhere else than precisely in the corruption of the soul. The conflict in or dissonance of the soul has no ‘necessary cause’ in anything external to the soul itself, nor in the relationship between the rational and the irrational parts as such, nor, consequently, in any of them independently. The problem is exactly *the strife* between reason and unreason, and *we are ourselves* the strife. So, if we are to get clear about what actually underpins and is involved in the conflict between the rational and the irrational, we need to dig deeper.

### *The body*

What then about the body, how does it enter the picture? Why is it that the strife between reason and unreason gets transmuted or connected to a strife between mind/soul and body/flesh, as especially the eschatological tale indicates by claiming that true or ultimate justice, true or ultimate reason and goodness, is possible only after the separation of soul from body?

As we saw in the dialogue itself, Socrates makes the strong suggestion, countering Callicles’ claim of the virtue of appetites and pleasures, that our secular life is perhaps rather a death or a dead life while physical death, in turn, is

<sup>57</sup> Once again, for an account of what I think the notion of discipline *means* here in the Platonic context, that is, what its non-ironic meaning is, see the following chapter.



rather the liberation into life. Here, through this 'picture', our bodies enter the problematic of the split or strife of the soul by being characterised as the space of death where our souls, in their miserable, ignorant and confused states, dwell: the body is our 'living dead', the soul's tomb. Or rather, the body is the *sign* of the soul's miserable state. For as Plato suggests in the *Cratylus* dialogue, echoing his suggestion in *Gorgias*, "some people say that the body (*sōma*) is the tomb (*sēma*) of the soul, on the ground that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called 'a sign' (*sēma*) because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body" (*Cratylus*, 400 c).

Remember that Plato, in *Gorgias*, depicts the appetites as essentially open to persuasion (and conviction) without knowledge in their undisciplined and unstable movements back and forth. Consequently, a soul *ruled* by the appetites—irrationally—is completely unable to pursue and fulfil the *telos* or will of human beings, namely the good. Furthermore, and this is my suggestion, as the body is the means by which the soul expresses itself, and as our human predicament seems to be so tightly tied to the rule of the appetites, our body becomes, as it were, a dead sign, that is, a tomb, "an enclosure or a prison in which the soul is securely kept (*sōzetai*)—as the name '*sōma*' itself suggests" (*Cratylus*, 400 c-d). In effect, when the body signifies a desire that is in conflict with the good and, hence, with reason and the will, it is unable to, it fails to signify the actual will or purpose of the soul; it is dead, empty—lacks meaning—like the contents of a tomb.

The eschatological tale with which Plato ends *Gorgias* strengthens even further the notion of the body as a sign failing to signify that which it wants and, consequently, as embedded in the strife between reason and unreason. Bring to mind that it is only in Hades that each soul meets its final judgement, a judgement that once and for all places reason, justice, the good, on its rightful throne above the appetites, unreason, and injustice. The necessary requirement for this final victory of reason over unreason, justice over injustice, is, according to the account advocated by the tale, that each individual, both the judge and the judged, are separated from their respective 'bodies'; that each individual's soul is made "naked". In the eschatological tale, then, the body is portrayed as a cloth, or again, as a dead sign or mark, necessarily veiling the soul's true nature and will; the good. It veils, in other words, the soul's true, undivided, expression.

But here we obviously face our central question: if the final victory of reason over unreason *cannot* arrive as long as the soul and its reasoning are tied to the body, does this mean that the souls on the Isles of the Blessed—or the souls in the prison of retribution—are completely formless, expressionless, ethereal? This does not in fact seem to be what Plato envisions. For it is explicitly said that the happy souls that reach the Isles of the Blessed rejoice together, just as Socrates, in the *Apology*, envisions the *possible* life after death to be a happy one,

as he is able to continue discussing with all the greatest souls the world has ever seen (*Apology*, 40 e - 41 c). Likewise, the wicked souls suffering in the prison of retribution are partly meant to function as warning *signs* (expressing their "pain and suffering") for those entering Hades. In short, if 'body' is to be understood solely as that with which "the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify", and as it seems that the "naked" souls of Hades are not deprived of form and the power to signify, then there seems to be a sense in which souls do have a 'body' also in Hades. What this then in turn seems to imply is that Plato uses, in *Gorgias*, the notion of 'body'—as something that can and must be separated from the soul—exclusively as pertaining to *the split or dissonance of the soul*. In other words, he uses it exclusively to refer to a *dead* sign, the sign that fails to express what it wants, and not the sign with which a "naked soul" expresses itself. Put differently, 'body' is used in dialectic terms as an ironical response to Callicles' praising of the enjoyments of the 'body'. In this sense, I would suggest, we need to read the idea of a separation of soul from body as pointing towards a desire for an undivided unity between the soul/will and its expression; the good as the undivided expression of the soul.

### **The Mind-Body Strife II: The Body as the Object of the Social Gaze**

Appetites (themselves) lack any rational or discursive justifications and are hence differentiated from the will, unable to pursue the good. However, as I stressed, the appetites, despite lacking in reason, manifest a *force* opposed to reason *only* in an unhealthy (i.e. dissonant) soul, that is, in a soul in which the appetites are *given the rule*. For it lies not in the power of the appetites to, as it were, conspire for the rule of the soul; appetites lack any determined direction and *human* purpose; they do not have a *will*. Hence, the appetites are not themselves the reason for or cause of the corruption of the soul.

In fact, the central concern of the dialogue is not with appetites as such. Rather, as already noted, it is centrally concerned with Gorgias', Polus', and Callicles' urge to secure themselves from becoming victims of unjust acts and thus humiliated, and their attempt to rationally justify this urge of theirs. Importantly, this struggle to evade humiliation comes to expression as a desire to rule, that is, to rule *without* any regard to the good, without any regard as to what is just. The only thing that seems to be their (displaced) object of desire is the affirmation of their position, *by the social gaze*, as admirable and envied. More specifically, Socrates' interlocutors seem to desire a ruling (power) that secures social admiration with the cost, perhaps even with the imminent necessity, of doing what is unjust.

Now, my main aim in this section is to make the case that, in *Gorgias*, the source of the corruption of the soul and, consequently, of the epistemic misjudgements, is identified as the soul's attempt to secure itself from the reality of desire, from the 'nakedness' of the soul('s desire), and that this results or is manifested in the search for social affirmation.

*The (displaced) desire for affirmation by the social gaze*

Socrates' initial inquiry was what kind of a craft oratory is. In response, oratory is ascribed, by the interlocutors, all kinds of qualities and properties: Oratory is the "most admirable of the crafts" (448c), it is a "competitive skill" (456d) which "encompasses and subordinates to itself just about everything that can be accomplished" (456b), and orators, like tyrants, are envied and held in high regard (466b-c). By virtue of these magnificent features, that is, by virtue of the power and social positioning it can generate, oratory then serves to protect against all kinds of unjust accusations and acts (e.g. 483 b), against the anxiously anticipated aggressivity of the collective; against the anticipated aggressivity of other individuals in relation to whom one is 'forced' to position oneself and whom one, regardless, still desires to be with. As I will argue, what the interlocutors are most concerned with is the evasion of humiliation (not simply becoming victims of unjust acts), that is, with losing (or never gaining) the affirmation of the social gaze.

It is important to note that it is only in relation to the social positioning, that the fulfilment of appetites and pleasures have any significant importance for Socrates' interlocutors. For it is, as we clearly see in the dialogue, not the pleasures of eating, drinking, and scratching that Callicles is actually interested in. Rather, it is eating, drinking, and why not also scratching, when and *only* when the fulfilment of these are objects of admiration and envy; or when they reflect or manifest the object of admiration and envy. So, whatever qualifies as a *desirable* pleasure or enjoyment is dependent on the very position a given pleasure has in the eyes of the other whose admiration and desire one seeks to attain.<sup>58</sup>

Take for instance Callicles' resentful attitude towards Socrates' suggestion that one needs to control and discipline one's appetites. To place one's natural

<sup>58</sup> This is, arguably, why Callicles is quick to retract his earlier claim that there is no difference between good and bad pleasures as soon as his utterances and claims become evidently foul (499 b). For the foulness is, arguably, seen by Callicles as shameful, both in terms of the pettiness and unworthiness of a life spent e.g. scratching, as well as in terms of 'losing' the argument to Socrates in front of a crowd of peers and the great orator Gorgias: Callicles' reputation is at stake here.

appetites under control and discipline means, Callicles holds, to make oneself a slave under external rule (492 a-b). So, more than Callicles praising the appetites as such—he does not, after all, seem to have any particular interest for any specific appetite or pleasure (except the guarantee of affirmation, his appetite *par excellence*)—he praises their unrestricted affirmation and fulfilment because of the picture of power and social positioning they seem to affirm. What lurks in the background here is of course Callicles', and Polus', idea of the dreamt of quality of the tyrant's social position and power. For the one who enjoys an absolute 'freedom' in their power to do whatever they *see fit to do* is the one who enjoys unquestioned social positioning and affirmation, and thus—Polus and Callicles seem to think—the greatest security against unjust acts and humiliation. Restricting one's appetites would then in turn be, Callicles seems to be saying, analogous to questioning the absolute authority and position of the tyrant, which would mean that the figure of the tyrant would lose his absolute affirmation. Put differently, any restrictions 'imposed' upon one's appetites is claimed to be, by Callicles, equal to having an 'external' rule determining one's soul. Imposing restrictions on the fulfilment of appetites would be equal to being a slave instead of a master.<sup>59</sup>

Although Polus claims that it is more shameful to do what is unjust than to suffer it, he does not sincerely hold this to be the case, as Callicles observantly notes. For just like Callicles, he rather likes to believe that in suffering injustice, and thus having one's social position/identity seriously humiliated, one's *soul* (will) is equally humiliated. That is, Polus and Callicles are morally-existentially conditioned by this belief and its underpinning (displacement of) desire. This means that both Polus and Callicles seem to be convinced that there is an *essential* tie between one's soul and one's social position. Or, they seem to identify the soul with the way one is seen and affirmed by the social gaze; they identify—as part of their fearful response—the soul with the image or appearance (the 'body') of the soul. In a way, this means that they seem to 'believe'—and try to advance the claim—that there is no distinction between appearance and reality in their own (or anyone else's) 'social identity'. It is exactly this supposed unity that is dismantled when their *wills* intrude upon their 'beliefs' through the Socratic discursive examination. And when Callicles hesitantly confesses to Socrates: "I don't know, Socrates—in a way you seem to me to be right, but the thing that happens to most people has happened to me: I'm not really persuaded by you"

<sup>59</sup> I should note here that Socrates' reference to the "healthy" soul as "(self-)disciplined" and "lawful" ought to, I suggest, be understood as an *ironical* response to Callicles' claim about the virtues of the appetites, and his ideas of mastery contra slavery. The irony here is, arguably, that it is in fact Callicles and his 'tyranny' that is slave to an 'other', that is, to a fearful response. I will shortly come to this point in more detail, and to the notion of Platonic 'discipline' and its relationship to the truth of the soul/will in the following chapter.

(513 c), Socrates replies by saying: “It’s your love for the people [*demos*], Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me” (513 d). Here Socrates’ suspicion, voiced at the very beginning of the discussion with Callicles (481 d-e), is in fact confirmed: Callicles’ is driven by a love for *demos* more than by a love for philosophy, that is, more than by the truth of his own soul(’s will-desire). It is this (displaced) ‘love’ that keeps Callicles “shifting back and forth” (481 e)—just as the appetites do—and forces him to seek the affirmation of his beloved (the social gaze/*demos*) whichever way the beloved might be pulling. Consequently, the one who is bent on securing immunity against unjust acts and humiliation must become like the unjust, like the humiliators themselves, as it is exactly the affirmation by those—the potential wrongdoers (‘the people’)—one wants to secure.

However, one might then ask, what exactly is the tragedy of the Socratic examination for Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles? I mean, if it is so that identifying one’s soul with one’s social position/identity does *not* make oneself invulnerable, as one can always lose one’s social position and thus the affirmation it comes with, why keep insisting on the *identity* between the soul and one’s social position? What kind of a gain is internal to the search for social affirmation? The suggestion I will develop in the next subsection is that while achieving and maintaining (and upgrading) one’s social position is laborious and always precarious, the social position itself, by its very nature, (i) nevertheless *does* allow for a certain level of security against becoming victim of unjust acts and humiliation, and (ii) it *does secure* affirmation (a ‘certain’<sup>60</sup> desire) from the other (as long as the position is intact). In other words, a social position/identity *can* be held to generate the ultimate illusion, that is, portraying the impossible as possible. For it *secures* an image/illusion of desire. This is, arguably, why Callicles and Polus, to the bitter end, try to convince Socrates, or rather themselves, of the virtues of oratory. To the bitter end they try to, or wish they could, justify oratory’s potential to secure a social position, which would secure the affirmation of their souls by the other (the social gaze); would secure the image/illusion of a desire for the other’s desire.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Here ‘certain’ is meant to be read in its double sense, namely (i) as ‘in one sense’ and (ii) as ‘undeniable’, ‘unquestionable’, ‘infallible’.

<sup>61</sup> Again, the tyrant seems clearly to represent, in Polus’ and Callicles’ imagination anyhow, the wishful manifestation of absolute power and the guarantee of social prestige and its affirmation. Outside the reach of any individual, the tyrant is, at least potentially, immune to being shamed, as any attempts at shaming can be oppressed immediately and fatally at the sovereign ‘will’ of the tyrant. The tyrant might of course also, given the absolute position he enjoys, be merciful, nonchalant, unmoved etc. by any attempts at shaming him, as long as these attempts do not actually cause a threat to his position. Perhaps the ultimate fantasy attached to the tyrant, at least as he is hailed by Polus and Callicles, is the envious, although perhaps

*“Love for the people” and the displacement of desire*

Let us recapitulate the situation. Socrates’ interlocutors identify as the ultimate good the securing of social affirmation, which they understand as providing them with some kind of security against becoming victims of unjust acts and thus humiliation. They attempt to *secure* the desire of the social gaze or the “big Other”—as Lacan(ians) would say. The fulfilment of appetites are subordinate to this; for Callicles and Polus it seems that all that is worthwhile to pursue is measured in relation to the social gaze and its affirmative gesture. However, Socrates’ interlocutors do not really *want* this, as the securing of invulnerability (securing social affirmation) demands sacrificing what reason cannot but identify as an essential, grammatical, aspect of the good, namely justice. But why, we might ask, cannot reason vouch for this kind of *securing* of invulnerability, but only for justice? What, in other words, is it about the struggle for social affirmation as the ultimate goal of human life that goes against the will of the soul?

In *Gorgias* the nearest we seem to come to an ‘explicit answer’ to this question is the eschatological tale. However, this seems to provide us only with a cosmological order: because the final judgement, with its law and eternal consequences, inevitably awaits us. Nevertheless, I think that there is an implicit answer or sense to this question, which can be traced in the dialogue—including the eschatological tale. Moreover, I suggest that it ought to be traced by way of following the logic and dynamics of the distorting force at work. That is to say, my strategy here will be to try to understand what is presupposed in the urge for social affirmation and the *securing* of invulnerability (and what kind of invulnerability it is that is sought for).

I think that many of us would to some extent find it, if not convincing then at least close to the truth, to say that there is something fundamentally troubling about our mortality and, consequently, with being a *living* creature. And Socrates’ interlocutors do, *in some sense*, react to human mortality and finitude and think

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phantasmatic, admiration of the tyrant’s ability, due to his social position of power, to bring about in each individual, in each *subject*, exactly envy, (fearful) admiration, respect, and obedience. In short, the affirmation of his hegemonic position. There might of course be those who rebel against the tyrant, and who will suffer his wrath as a consequence. By this punishment of the questioning of the tyrant’s position, the tyrant seeks the (re-)establishment of the envy, respect and admiration that is missing. And such punishment works not only for the (re-)establishing or strengthening of the tyrant’s position in the eyes and minds of those who are being punished, for they also function as warning examples for everyone else who might be tempted to entertain the idea to question the tyrant’s position. —Each tormented cry, each sign of humiliation inflicted upon those questioning the tyrant’s position is an affirmation of the tyrant’s position and might, just as each tormented cry is an affirmation and example of the unquestionable authority of justice in the prison of retribution in Hades (cf. the eschatological tale in *Gorgias*). Strangely (or is it?) similar in kind, one might say (see the next section for more on this).

that oratory can to some extent secure them from this 'terrifying' condition. Likewise, Socrates responds to Callicles' claims by saying that a wise and just person should not fear death, and that we would do best in not thinking so much about how to keep ourselves alive, but rather about how to live good lives (522d-e). So, fear of death (and pain) and the associated vulnerability of our embodied being are clearly part of the picture. However, we need to acknowledge how the fear of death and vulnerability are—in *Gorgias*—essentially, grammatically, entangled with a fear of 'losing face', with being humiliated; in the dialogue we do not find any clear distinctions made between, on the one hand, a 'sheer' and 'raw' fear of death (or injustice) and, on the other hand, a fear of being seen in a shameful light by the social gaze, that is, of losing one's affirmation or not achieving it in the first place. Put otherwise, it is of central importance to see that the vulnerability given voice to in the dialogue is not a vulnerability in some 'general' sense (human 'morality' and 'finitude'), but specifically in relation *desire* and its entanglement with (social) affirmation. For while we might certainly fear a tiger or a volcano (obviously these two constitute grammatically different forms of fear from each other as well), we do not, in order to secure ourselves from them, seek or desire (social) affirmation from them (if we do so, then we have placed them within the dynamics of desire inherent in human relations, and to what extent we can do so, and what difference there is between doing so in relation to an animal and in relation to a volcano, is something to be discussed, but not here). Therefore, what we must seek to uncover is the dynamics involved in the specific fear to which the struggle for social affirmation is a reaction towards; a fear to which the social affirmation is thought to be an antidote.

Now, if what one fears is one's vulnerability with respect to other people and, in response, attempts to secure an invulnerability by means of affirmation, what is it one then fears, and desires? To fear becoming the victim of unjust acts, which is what Socrates' interlocutors explicitly and centrally identify as bad or undesirable—and which consequently underpins their dissonance of the soul—is to fear to be mistreated. What the struggle for social affirmation then seeks—at least in the sense Socrates' interlocutors depict it—is to avoid such mistreatment by attempting to secure respect and admiration from others. In other words, if what Socrates' interlocutors fear is to be mistreated, fear not to be cared for, to be abandoned, does this not then imply that what they *want*, what they desire and long for, is to be treated well, cared for, and loved by others? Is this not exactly what social affirmation tries to answer to? Well, this seems to be quite simply a grammatical tie implied by the very object of the fear, and is in fact what the interlocutors seem to mean by their desire to be seen as 'admirable'. So what is the problem with all of this? For if what Callicles and Polus *want* is to be cared for and loved by others, is this not exactly something that they will achieve through their struggles for fame and glory? Is not their "love for the

people” exactly answered by a ‘love from the people’? How is this in fact *not* what they *want*?

Think of the logic of injustice, as fleshed out in the *Gorgias*: in fearing to be mistreated—which is what the interlocutors do *not want*—and in attempting to *secure* themselves against it, they must *themselves* become what they ‘initially’ fear, namely perpetrators (like the tyrant). They must, in other words, take on that position which initially causes their *own* fear; they must become an ‘other’ to *themselves*. So the sinister character of this is that in attempting to *secure* themselves against their fears, the interlocutors must become that which forecloses their initial desire for love and care, a desire that exactly makes the fear of losing it so pressing and makes injustice so tempting. In this sense, one might say that *injustice is its own cause*.

What I am implying here is that the, as one might put it, unconscious of Socrates’ interlocutors reveal that their real will-desire is for the full cycle of desire, namely a desire for the other’s desire for one’s own desire. A few additional observations are in place. To begin with, it is important that we note that this reality of desire, so to speak, lacks any conditions for securing or guaranteeing itself. The fulfilment of desire hinges on nothing but that the other, in fact, desires us (our desire). The hideous truth of desire is, in other words, that we are, as Lévinas (1969) and Løgstrup (1992) would say, fully at the mercy of the other—to which I would add, and *vice versa*! Secondly, we need to note that the reality of (the initial) desire, that is, desire prior to any fearful and reactive response to this hideous truth of desire, lies at the level of the “naked soul”; the reality of desire prior to any attempt to *secure* it is a desire *of* the *person themselves* to be desired as *themselves, as such*. But if this is so, then this means that our desire *is* for the desire of the other person *themselves*, the other person *as such*. That is, the reality of one’s desire comes with the acknowledgement (be it repressed) that it is always the persons *themselves* that desire. So, if the initial reality of desire *is* desire for the other’s desire, this must mean, grammatically, that it is a desire for the same naked person(’s desire) that oneself is, in one’s real, initial desire. What the reality of desire thus, grammatically, implies, what it *means*, is that one, in one’s desire to be cared for and loved by the other, loves and cares for the (“naked”, undivided) soul of the other. It is this other person’s (own, undivided) desire that one desires. In short, in one’s initial (real) desire one, *as one self*, cares for and loves the other as *themselves*.<sup>62</sup>

62 Again, let me emphasise that by saying that the real desire of the soul is the desire *of* a whole or undivided soul *for* the desire of another whole or undivided soul—i.e. that one, *as oneself*, desire the other *as themselves*—does not (mean to) imply that this ‘as oneself’ refers to a substance, to a ‘pure self’. Rather, it should be understood exclusively as a contrast to the way the self is displaced in its attempt to divide itself from itself in order to secure affirmation. As one might put



It is in fact something of this sort that I think is articulated, in an allegorical (or is it in an unconscious?) fashion, in the eschatological tale. To begin with, as far as I can see, the tale is meant to be an allegorical representation of the ultimate event of reason, justice, the good. That is, it is meant to be an allegorical representation of what we ultimately want; of a desire no longer displaced. So what do we, according to the tale, ultimately *want*? To be "naked", to be rid of the *object* of the social gaze, namely the 'body' (see next subsection for more on this). But reason, justice, the good, does not manifest *solely* through the nakedness of *one* individual soul. Rather, it manifests itself in-between naked souls; between the judge and the judged, between souls that are isolated from the social gaze and stand before one another "with only [their] own soul[s]" (523e). The 'ultimate' event of the good is then, I suggest, the open, naked, and fearless, manifestation of the full circle of desire (we will return to this theme in due time).

And so we come to the question of what kind of 'reconciliation' social affirmation provides to the hideous reality of desire, and what it displaces. As a strategic attempt to (phantasmatically) overcome the impossible, namely to attempt to *secure* the other's desire—to do away with the fundamental openness of desire and its lack of reciprocal guarantee—Callicles attempts to make himself the *object* of the other's desire. That is, he transmutes or displaces his desire to be—as *himself*—desired by the other—as themselves—to construing himself as an image, sign (*sēma*), body (*sōma*) (*Gorgias*: 493 a; *Cratylus*: 400 c-d), which is affirmed by the 'social gaze'. This is his "love for the people". For the peculiar character of social affirmation is that acquiring the status of a specific position in the order of the social-symbolic gaze *means* to be affirmed. The social position *is* its own affirmation, and in this sense *secures* or *guarantees* the desire of the social gaze for its *object*, although never the desire of one *person* for another. It is, one might say, *as if* a social position (affirmation) had the potency of being the *irresistible object* of the other's desire—as if the other would have to, necessarily, desire *this*. Moreover, here lies the real reason for why the tyrant is the social position *par excellence* for Polus and Callicles: it is *as if*, because the tyrant seems to enjoy unquestionable affirmation, he is an *irresistible object of desire*.

To note, the search for social affirmation as a means to *secure* the desire of the other backfires, then, in a double sense. First, it is not we ourselves *as ourselves* that become cared for, loved. Nor is it we ourselves *as ourselves* that receive the desire of the other *as themselves*. To the extent we want to *secure* the desire of the other we seek not the desire of the other's soul (for this cannot be *secured*), but only the desire of the other as a representation of, in the position of, the social gaze. One might even say that in our pursuit of 'security' and the

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it, it is only through and in relation to this displacement or divide that a notion of an 'unseen' kernel of the self enters the 'space of logic'.

evasion of the reality of desire through social affirmation, we transmute the other's soul and desire more and more into the object of our own paranoia (our fear of the openness of desire). So, although we always *want* love and the desire of the other *as themselves* (and love and desire others as themselves), that is, although we want the good, our attempts to secure, to guarantee, the desire of the other cannot but result in doing what we see fit rather than what we really want, as we displace, or give up on, what it is we actually want-desire. The same might be formulated by saying that the reality of desire (what we really want), while not part of the (interlocutor's) *conscious* claims and beliefs, nevertheless continuously comes to expression in the *grammar* of these claims and beliefs. Put in psychoanalytical terms, the displacement of desire divides the soul between the *conscious* and the *unconscious* self. Again, if this was not the case—and if Plato did not in some sense also think this—that is to say, if we in truth did not care for and love others, if what we really wanted was only social affirmation, then Socrates' interlocutors should have had no problem keeping their rational justifications quite sound, as there would have been nothing in their 'rational positions' that would have divided their souls.

Whether or not Plato (consciously) thought of anything like this, the kind of dynamics I have depicted above nonetheless 'fit' the dynamics Plato is depicting. Namely, the dynamics depicted above is illustrative of a split in the soul between doing what one wants and doing what one sees fit to do, while, nevertheless, always wanting the good. I will try to develop, in more detail, the dynamics of affirmation and its linkages to the fundamental corruption of the soul especially in the next chapter. For now, let this stand as a suggestion of the sense that one might trace underpinning the issues in *Gorgias*. And, as we move on, I will try to produce more witnesses to this suggestion and illustrate the way in which it connects with the other central themes we have identified as intertwined with the mind-body strife.

### *The body as the object of the social gaze*

Let us now take a more detailed look at how this distorting dynamics of the soul is entangled with, or is transmuted into the mind's or soul's relationship to, and its tension with 'body', or *sōma*. As I already suggested, and will now try to make clearer, I read Plato as suggesting that the notion of 'body' is to be conceived of as the (dead) sign (tomb) of the individual's social identity and its position in the eyes of the social gaze. 'Body' is the sign, the expression of one's "love for the people" and, simultaneously, this 'love's' object. In other words, 'body' is the very sign of unreason, of displacement.

Let us begin by shortly recounting some central passages from the eschatological tale. Socrates starts his account of the tale by noting that in the beginning, and up until “Zeus’ tenure of sovereignty” (523b), the final judgement, which was to determine the soul’s eternal fate, was declared while both the judged and the judge were still alive (523b), that is, before death had separated soul from body (524b). This arrangement resulted in a catastrophe as “people were undeservingly making their way in both directions [to the “Isles of the Blessed” and to the ‘prison of payment and retribution’]” (523c). Now, the reason for these misjudgements was, as noted already in the first section of this chapter, that the soul was veiled by the cloth of the ‘body’. More precisely, the soul was veiled by the dazzle of earthly riches. And what makes earthly riches ‘riches’, what makes them ‘dazzle’, is (grammatically) that they are perceived as filing the ‘position’ of ‘riches’; that they acquire their social status through a social gaze. This point is made all the more clear when Socrates recounts Zeus’ reaction to the predicament Hades was made to witness:

'Many', he [Zeus] said, 'whose souls are wicked are dressed in handsome bodies, good stock and wealth, and when the judgement takes place they have many witnesses appear to testify that they have lived just lives. Now the judges are awestruck by these things and pass judgement at a time when they themselves are fully dressed, too, having put their eyes and ears and their whole bodies up as screens in front of their souls. All these things, their own clothing and that of those being judged, have proved to be obstructive to them.' (523 c-d).

That these handsome and successful bodies are able to call many witnesses to testify, falsely, on their behalf and to advocate for their worthiness, speaks of the (false) virtue of these qualities—over and above the (true) virtue the good, of justice—in the eyes and minds of those peers ('the people') who draw to witness. Moreover, the admiration of these qualities and attributes bespeak the way in which the 'social imagination' envisions the ends or the purpose of life (of social identity, -positioning, and -power) and the moral-existential investments these are impregnated with. Consequently, advocating for the 'justness' of the handsome and successful 'body', the 'justness' of the social identity or position it represents and manifests, the witnesses testify on behalf of (for the benefit of) themselves as well. That is to say, they advocate for the worthiness of the moral-existential investments, for the hopes and fantasies, which the witnesses themselves have invested in this handsome and successful 'body' that now stands before the ultimate trial. The “screen in front of the soul”, which 'body' makes up, is not simply an epistemic screen were ‘the senses’ as such necessarily distort the information passing between souls. Rather, as I have tried to argue, it is a screen

that situates itself at the very point of division in the soul between the reality of desire and the displacement of it through the struggle to overcome the essential 'insecurity' of desire by way of social affirmation.

However, it is not only the living witnesses who are dazzled by the handsome body, for so are the living judges as well. Nor is it simply *the other's body*, with its social dazzle—or social poverty, or mediocrity—that blinds the soul's eye of the judge. It is the judge's own body, his own investment in and admiration of social positioning, which prevents the truth of the soul from being perceived, acknowledged. And in addition, what strengthens the (false) virtue of this 'handsome body' are all the witnesses gathered to testify in favour of it. In short, the living judge is mesmerized by all that which testifies to the social admiration/position this body signifies, which, again, speaks of the judge's own investment in the body, in social positioning; bespeaks the judge's own displacement of desire. Conversely, when the soul is finally separated from the body, both judged and judge are, so it seems, 'freed', or 'forced', from the *possibility* of appealing to the social gaze, and as their perceptive (grammatical) capacity is 'purified' or (re)gained, they stand "naked" and anonymously before each other, "isolated from all kinsmen" and "all that adornment" is "left behind on earth" (523 e). The soul's naked openness, its true/real being, depends, in other words, on the abolition of the moral-existential investment in the 'earthly' social gaze with its identity formations and social positioning.<sup>63</sup>

The Platonic soul has, as one can easily note, a strong interpersonal core to it. In one's (social) embodiment one's soul is displaced in the object of the social gaze—body—and consequently hidden from both the other's perception (which is then also due to the other's own embodiment/entombment) as well as by the very light, the internally assumed social gaze, by which one sees or understands oneself. In other words, the social gaze with which one understands oneself is a perspective on oneself *as seen by the other*; and importantly, 'the other' as a representative or bearer of the social gaze. Again conversely, after death, when the soul is naked, it is the judge (also in this same naked state) who gives the final verdict, through his "study" of the soul, about the true nature and state of the individual. It is not, then, the individuals *themselves* that have the (private) authority to determine the truth of their own souls—although the separation from the body has left the individual naked and isolated from the social gaze—nor do they occupy, alone, self-sufficiently, the position or perspective from which this truth can be seen. Moreover, although the final judgement obviously, so it seems to me, represents the event or manifestation of pure reason, justice, the good, it is, nevertheless, important to note that this ultimate judgement lacks

63 In the following chapter, I will reflect more on what the nakedness of the soul can be understood to mean, and how it connects with the vanishing or non-existence of the social gaze and its object.

any, as it were, centre of authority. Sure, the judge studies the soul of the judged, but it is not the judges own (arbitrary) decision upon which the judgement is made, but rather upon the reality of the soul itself. Furthermore, the judge is neither an authority in the sense that (i) they are just as much in need of a relinquishing of (their investment in) the 'body' and (ii), they are themselves, as a naked soul, simply one that stands before the other (the judged) in their own naked and open desire. Hence the following suggestion: truth, goodness, is internal to the soul itself through the naked openness *between* souls; *truth, goodness, lies, as one might say, in the naked openness in-between individuals.*

What my suggestion then comes to, so far, is that we can read Plato's *Gorgias* as localising the core split of humans not only as one between reason and unreason, but more precisely, as a split between a desire for social affirmation ("love for the people")—which veils the soul in its displacement of will-desire—and a true or real self whose will-desire is signified without displacement and, importantly, always comes to light (for oneself and the other) in the naked openness between individuals as an *I* towards a *you*<sup>64</sup>. Put differently, my suggestion is that it is the dynamics of a "love for the people" that corrupts the soul and qualifies the 'body', that is, the soul's (dead) expression, as meaningless, as empty, as a tomb. Or again, alternatively, the emptiness of the soul's dead expression is tied to its turning towards the social gaze, whereas the living expression is one in which there is no gap between the 'inner' and the expression, one in which one does not turn away from the reality of desire to social affirmation and thus to social imageries. As we should also note, this is the quintessential feature of a Socratic examination; rational justification is empty as long as there is not an individual person that is able to tie his or her soul, undivided, to whatever the claim might be. As Socrates points out: "So please don't tell me to call for a vote from the people present here [...] For I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I'm saying, and that's the man I'm having a discussion with. The majority I disregard" (474 a).

*"The screen in front of their eyes": the self-referential 'body'*

I have refrained from making any substantial references to other works of Plato—with the exception of a few remarks on *Cratylus*—as my aim has not been to make any overarching claims about Plato's philosophy, but rather to restrict the discussion exclusively to *Gorgias*. Nevertheless, I cannot resist the

64 Here the notion of the openness between individuals as a second person perspective, or an I-you relationship, builds on notions developed first by Hannes Nykänen (2002) and later on by Joel Backström (2007).

temptation to draw a parallel between the picture given to us of, on the one hand, the soul's relationship to the good and to the body in *Gorgias* and, on the other hand, the soul's relationship to the good, the real, and the imprisonment of the soul in one of the most formative allegories of western thought, namely Plato's allegory of the cave, found in book seven of the *Republic*. In fact, I will try to make the case that we can see very close similarities between the separation of the soul from the body in Hades (*Gorgias*) and the ascension from the cave out into the 'real world' (*Republic*). Moreover, the reason for drawing this parallel is that it helps me to point out some further aspects of what it is about the 'body', conceived as the sign of one's "love for the people", which makes it dead, a tomb, a displacement of desire.

In *Gorgias*, while telling the eschatological tale, Socrates recounts Zeus' diagnosis of why souls were misjudged and displaced (when people were judged alive by living judges). The reason given by Zeus was that the judges, as well as those judged and their peers, had "put their eyes and ears and their whole bodies up as screens in front of their souls" (523c-d). In the allegory of the cave, the wall upon which the shadows of various artefacts are cast by the fire in the cave, and which composes the 'reality' of those chained in the cave so that they are "able to see only in front of them" (*Republic*, 514a), is characterised as a "screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets" (*Republic*, 514b). So, both the 'body' (*Gorgias*) and the wall of the cave (*Republic*) are portrayed as screens, and on these screens signs, images, simulacrum are projected, which create a false relation in the minds or souls of people between the signifier, the 'image', and the signified. Put differently, the problem with the screens here is that the shadows, signs, or images, fail to represent or denote that which they are signs, images, shadows of. Instead, the shadows or the images become *themselves*, through displacement, misidentified as the real deal. The people in the cave 'think' that shadows are not shadows but the things themselves and people embodied, entombed, 'think' that their social appearance, their 'bodies' as seen by the social gaze, are equal to their souls.

In the allegory of the cave the hero of the story, when (for some reason) freed from his shackles, is "compelled" and "dragged" (*Republic*, 515d-e) towards the opening of the cave out into the real world, where he encounters, not simply human artefacts or their shadows (as in the cave) but real things (true meaning, the actual grammar), illuminated—or animated—by the real sun (not the fire in the cave), which, being the "last thing to be seen", is "the good" (*Republic*, 517b). It is of course of central interest to us that Plato identifies the ultimate of all things as the good<sup>65</sup>, and not as the true, or the beautiful. In fact, Plato suggests,

65 Again, remember that the ultimate or final stands here just as much for that which ultimately moves all (the final cause) as well as towards which all moves.

“one must conclude that [the good] is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything” (*Republic*, 517c). Likewise, in Hades (*Gorgias*), it is justice, or the good, which is portrayed as the ultimate of all things, rather than the true or the beautiful. Yet, while I will have something to say about this later on, right now our interest lies mainly with the ascent from darkness to light, from entombment to life. For as I already indicated, I think there is room to read the ascent from the cave into the real world as a process of the separation, or liberation, of soul from 'body', liberation from 'body' understood as the sign of one's "love for the people".

This becomes clearest when Plato characterises the difference between the life in the open of the real and that of the cave. For here Plato identifies, not simply the epistemic predicament of the prisoners in the depths of the cave, but rather connects the epistemic failure with the type of social reality that the prisoners of the cave have given birth to. As Plato explains.

What about when [the hero] reminds himself of his first dwelling place, his fellow prisoners, and what passed for wisdom there? Don't you think he'd count himself happy for the change and pity the others?

Certainly

And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them [the prisoners] for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows [on the "screen"] as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future, do you think our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? (*Republic*, 516 c-d).

The answer is of course no (*Republic*, 516 e), our hero would certainly not (really, rationally) *want* such a dead or empty life. And so, Plato/Socrates continues.

Consider this too. If this man went down into the cave again and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes—coming suddenly out of the sun like that—be filled with darkness?

They certainly would.

And before his eyes had recovered—and the adjustment would not be quick—while his vision was still dim, if he had to compete again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, wouldn't he invite

ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? (*Republic*, 516 e - 517 a)

So the reality in the cave, which the hero has managed to escape, is (retroactively, i.e., from the 'outside') characterised as essentially a competition amongst the "perpetual prisoners" for (social) 'fame and glory', that is, for social affirmation, and the "screen in front of their eyes" ('body') is the arena where this spectacle is played out. This is made all the more pressing as the hero attempts to rejoin the prisoners in order to inform them of the 'real world'. For as soon as he takes his old seat, he is not only blinded by the darkness of the cave, but more importantly, his communion with his peers and "what passes for wisdom there" is measured in relation to the 'social competence' of competing for admiration, into which he is directly pulled into by the prisoners. It is, in other words, the moral-existential investment in the social gaze, in social affirmation, which is the 'chains and shackles' of the prisoners.

But then, what about the issue of death, the issue of the body as a dead sign, as a tomb? As I already pointed out, the quintessential problem with the signs, images, simulacrum, projected onto the screens in front of the prisoners' eyes, is that they exactly fail to be signs, images; there is something about these shadows on the screen, about the whole atmosphere or spirit in which they are perceived, which deserts the real. Put otherwise, the image or sign simply refers back to itself, back to an image; the image becomes self-referential and thus loses contact with that which animates it—the good, or alternatively the naked soul (cf. *Cratylus* 399e- 400b). It becomes a dead sign. It is perhaps also worth noting the way in which Plato here seems to equate error, and sin, with privation, like Augustine and Descartes do—although with a slightly different meaning. That is to say, the objects of the erroneous judgements *lack*, as it were, their own substance; they exist only because of, as shadows/images of, the real; the shadows/images are, as it were, *added* with false properties, with false existence/being. The objects of error and sin do not have their own, independent existence, for the very essence of the illusion is the way the soul attempts *to make* shadows or images self-sufficient, real-in-themselves. In short, error and sin are only the privation of goodness through the addition of false properties/existence.<sup>66</sup>

This is exactly the case with oratory, or at least what becomes of oratory—the uses of words/signs—when it serves, not only Polus' and Callicles' "love for

66 This is why, for both Augustine and Descartes, although not for Plato for reasons that will become clearer in the following chapter, the search for truth, the search for indubitable truths, is a *reduction* of all that is not essential rather than an adding of anything (see Menn 2002, especially chapter 5)



the people”, but also the peoples’ “love for the people”. Think for instance of how both Callicles and Polus identify their social appearances—how they are perceived by the social gaze—with their souls; they think that harm (humiliation, shame) done to this *image* of themselves is harm done to their souls. That is to say, they think that the image is the real thing. Now, when this basic displacement has occurred, the orator kills off the living, undivided <sup>67</sup> sign/expression and transmutes speech into sorcery; orators crate a form of speech that aims at identifying the image/sign with truth/the real. This is how they produce “conviction without knowledge”, that is, create the appearance of truth by way of images, hiding the very imagery of the image. It is as if the image animated itself, as if the image was the good; as when Socrates’ interlocutors attempt to justify rationally the ultimate goodness of searching to secure an invulnerability of desire. And again, all of this sorcery, all of this production of deceptive images, is exercised in order to create another image, namely the image of the orator himself as admirable, as good, as wise, without any regard as to the true condition of the soul—and its true will-desire. Hence, the image simply circles around in endless loops, attempting to rid itself of the real, while simultaneously completely possessed by a will, and a desire, for the real.—As in the dynamics of affirmation; one desires a real, genuine, care from the other, yet simultaneously desires a *secured*, guaranteed, care. Being incommensurable desires, in the pursuit of securing or guaranteeing care and love one is doomed to attempt to repress the real, ‘non-guaranteed’ desire for the other’s desire while, simultaneously, the real of desire continues to express itself (unconsciously) in the grammar of will-desire, i.e. the grammar of one’s utterances and deeds. Endlessly, anxiously, paranoiacally, trying to reproduce the (repressed) real everywhere, totally. This is the fate of the ‘tyrant’.

As noted, the sorcery of oratory, and more generally, the logic of social affirmation, hinges completely, not only on Polus’ and Callicles’ “love for the people”, but on the peoples’ “love for the people”. That is, the sorcery of oratory works only to the extent that more or less every individual, or a sufficient amount of individuals contribute to the production of the illusion. That is to say, the sorcery of oratory depends on people letting themselves be hypnotised by the seeming beauty, truth, and goodness of the orator’s speech—just as the success of marketing and advertisement depend on the availability, in individuals, of those ‘desires’ they stimulate. And, it is, of course, not surprising that it works so well as it, arguably, does, insofar as the hideous reality of desire is something each individual faces equally. As we might recall, the prisoners of the cave have “been there since childhood” (*Republic*, 514 a). We all partake in Original sin, and

67 Undivided, that is, between will-desire and the displaced desire for affirmation.

this is why even the judge of the ultimate judgement (*Gorgias*) must be equally “naked”.

### **Discursive Reason as Ressentiment: Asceticism, Discipline, and the Perverse Fantasy of a Final Reward**

Before we move on to the final section of this chapter, where I will try to further elucidate what to me seems to be a central feature of the unity of the true and the good, I want to devote this section to the voices of Socrates' interlocutors, especially Callicles—and Nietzsche as well.

If the interlocutors', and particularly Callicles' claims and his whole stance is shown to be in fact determined by the social gaze, and thus distorted, how is it then with Plato himself? Do we have any reason to think that there is some truth to Callicles' and Polus' claims that Socrates is just too cunning or too ashamed to admit that he himself, secretly, wishes to be like the tyrant (e.g. 471 e)? Furthermore, do we have any reason to think, as does Socrates' interlocutors, that the essence of Socratic philosophy is in fact driven by an envious and hence distorted, unnatural, indirect, and nihilistic, “will to power”, as Nietzsche (1968) would say?

In what follows, I will try to play the interlocutors' (especially Callicles') (defence) advocate, and attempt to make as good a case as I can that Plato himself is also driven by a desire for enjoyment of power/affirmation and pleasure/appetites, as well as inflicted by deep ressentiment. This will mean undermining or reversing all the ‘positive’ things I have been saying about reason and its relation to the good and the will, and attempting to reveal the potential shadowy, dark side of Plato's thoughts. The ease with which one can, arguably, do this, and—as Nietzsche (1996) in his best moments is able to show—the striking power of explanation this seems to provide are, so I think, reasons enough to devote some time to the issue.

#### *The ascetic dimensions of the 'justice' of discursive reason*

Although one can surely find clear traces of it already in the dialogical exchange between Socrates and his interlocutors, it is particularly Plato's utilisation of the eschatological tale at the end of the dialogue, which gives weight to the suspicion voiced by both Polus and Callicles, that Plato is one of the high priests of a corrupt and ressentiment-filled ideal of knowledge, truth, and goodness. Let us begin by reflecting on what one, with reference to Nietzsche, might call the

ascetic ideals attached to Plato's notion of reason, namely the notion that human purpose, the good, can be realised only when the appetites and pleasures of the soul are disciplined and ruled by reason—which ultimately seems to indicate the very extinction of the 'enjoying body'.

As noted in connection with our discussion on the appetites, Plato does not as such rule out the appetites and the pleasures of the flesh from a life of truth/reason. Rather, it is only when the soul is 'unhealthy', that is, when the soul is guided, without rational discipline, by the appetites, that the enjoyment of these appetites should be restricted. Conversely, when a person's soul is healthy, when it is under the rule of reason, the enjoyment of the appetites will not be opposed to reason, or the good. So for those who are fully rational/good, pleasures and appetites will also be good. The quintessential difference between Socrates and his interlocutors is, then, that while the latter suggest that the good should be understood in terms of pleasures and power, Plato argues that this is not the case, as the good cannot be contrary to what sound rational justification vouches for, and only a harmonious soul, one that is not split into a dissonance with itself, can know the good and be good.

However, the accusation Plato faces by his interlocutors, and by Nietzsche (1996; 1998; see also Wilkerson 2006; Roberts 1998), is that the rational and good he argues for are in fact pleasure and enjoyment masked as reason and justice. That is to say, the suspicion here is that Plato does in fact think that pleasures and enjoyment are the ultimate good; are identical with the good. Socrates/Plato only tricks his interlocutors and 'the crowd', like a sorcerer, into not seeing this; Socrates is really a "crowd pleaser". Can this be true?

"[W]hen a man who has lived a just and pious life comes to his end, he goes to the Isles of the Blessed, to make his abode in complete happiness" (523 b). Passages like this one make it quite hard not to read the final fate of the rational and just soul as characterised by an intensified enjoyment and pleasure; *complete happiness throughout eternity*. One must of course keep in mind that "happiness" here refers not simply to an exuberant state of enjoyment, but first and foremost to the fulfilment of the human *telos*, namely life completely in accordance with reason. Nevertheless, having settled on the Isles of the Blessed, the just and pious soul is "beyond the reach of evils". Just imagine; to finally reach a place where all struggles, all threats and dangers, all the temptations of the forbidden, vanish. Finally, a place where the soul can be free from all its torment and rest eternally—how can we avoid thinking, 'what a fantastic state of mind this must be!' However, the pleasures do not, arguably, stop here, as the Isles of the Blessed is not simply a place of eternal rest. On the contrary, it is on the Isles of the Blessed, when the soul has finally become completely healthy—just, good, rational—that life can really begin, as Socrates' reference to Euripides' lines suggests: "*But who knows whether being alive is being dead, And being dead is being alive*" (492 e). For as I have pointed out repeatedly, Plato's idea of reason and the

good does not condemn appetites and pleasures to a final extinction but only to a strict subordination to reason/the good. And—does this not then follow?—now that reason finally, here on the Isles of the Blessed, has the sovereign rule over the soul, the soul is liberated to an unrestricted enjoyment of all the pleasures and appetites available in this paradise of reason.

Here again we might be reminded of the close similarities between Plato and Augustine. As Augustine explains, the parts of the soul where lust and anger reside, which are

vicious even in a wise and temperate man [...] were not vicious in Paradise before sin, for they were never moved in opposition to a holy will towards any object from which it was necessary that they should be withheld by the restraining bridle of reason. For though they are now moved this way and are regulated by a bridling and restraining power, which those who live temperately, justly, and godly, exercise, sometimes with ease, and sometimes with greater difficulty, this is not the sound health of nature, but the weakness which results from sin (Augustine 1952a, XIV: 19, pp. 391).

For Augustine, as for Plato, then, the appetites are vicious because they are not under the absolute rule of reason, or rather, because in their earthly and embodied existence the will of humans is split from its source and destination/purpose, namely the Good, God, Truth. The predicament of earthly existence is hence to struggle to discipline the appetites. Yet, before the Fall, and consequently after the reunification with the will of God, when the “sound health of nature” is (re)established, the appetites are “naturally”, that is, without effort, tied to the will and the will to God, and so the enjoyment of any given appetite—which *can be reconciled with the will*—is purged of its corruption.<sup>68</sup>

We thus seem to have some grounds for thinking that the ascetic ideal comes equipped with, not only a promise of a life in truth/reason, but with a promise of the attainment of a higher, a truer, enjoyment of the pleasurable. And here reason, with its aim of attaining this true enjoyment of the pleasurable, associates itself with death; it becomes, as Nietzsche notes, a nihilistic ‘love for truth’ (Nietzsche 1996). For as Plato—echoed by Augustine—seems to be indicating, at least in *Gorgias*, earthly embodied existence can in a strong sense

<sup>68</sup> Concerning Augustine, it is central to his doctrine that the most condemnable of all earthly enjoyments/appetites, namely sexual intercourse, is something that nevertheless can be reconciled with the will and thus have its ‘natural’ place in Paradise. This claim that sexuality and intercourse was not evil *as such*, was the defining aspect of Augustine’s so-called anti-Manichean defence of procreation (Augustine 1952a, XIV: 19–27, pp. 391–397; see also van Oort 2012)

never be fully rational and is hence bound to a disciplining. True pleasure, pleasure unleashed, is to be found only after the separation of the soul from the body, as Socrates/Plato relocates life, with its enjoyments of the pleasurable, in a transcendent abode, beyond the very corpses or tombs that are our 'bodies'. As Callicles notes, if Socrates is right about the ideal of reason's independence from the appetites, then "stones and corpses would be happiest" (493 e)—in *this* life.

The case I am trying to build here is this: can we not read the Platonic project as a means to, as underpinned by the desire to, (once more) gain 'legitimate' access to the appetites and pleasures. The twist here, with respect to Plato's own account, is then not only that the fulfilment of appetites and pleasures is placed as the real constitutive driving force of the project of reason. For the suspicion of my clients Callicles, Polus, and Nietzsche, is primarily directed against what it *means* for Plato for something to be corrupt. To repeat, the will to truth, with its ascetic ideal, seems to (can be seen to) hide within itself a desire for enjoyment of the pleasurable, and thus, paradoxically, for death. Yet, and here comes the quintessential accusation against Plato, not for a final death, absolute nothingness, but rather for the abolition of one's *impotence*. This is at least how both Callicles and Nietzsche (1996) see it. Namely, the suggestion here is that the ascetic ideals Plato is advocating for are simply the virtues of "law" set up by the weak individuals in order to suppress and invert the natural superiority of the naturally better and worthier individuals. For, since it belongs to the nature of these naturally better and worthier individuals that they, because of their superior powers, are able to more or less freely satisfy their natural appetites (their 'natural drives'), and since it, conversely, belongs to the nature of the naturally weaker that they fail to fulfil this essential need, these latter and weaker creatures deploy a whole cosmology in which their impotence is concealed or sublimated in ascetic ideals of reason and justice. In other words, by deploying a cosmology of asceticism these weak individuals are able to invert the natural virtues of humans and place their own weakness and impotence at the top, instead of on the bottom, of a value hierarchy (*Gorgias* 491 e – 492e; Nietzsche 1996). And this inversion of the value hierarchy is motivated by the weak individuals' desires to satisfy their appetites, which is—as we have already noted above and as Callicles and even more strongly Nietzsche recognises—interconnected with their will to power. So the accusation here is that Plato (i) relocates the demand and dreamt of fulfilment of the appetites (pleasure) in the hereafter—in the post-impotence era—and (ii) simultaneously generates a (perverted) compensatory and 'earthly' pleasure through the enjoyment of a self-proclaimed glorification (social affirmation) of the weak individuals as 'good' and the naturally stronger as 'bad'/'evil'. In other words, the weak generate a form of enjoyment through casting a favourable light on their persona; the pleasure of social affirmation. And they do this by creating a social gaze that is constituted

in the perverted value hierarchy. This is how they, in their perversion, manifest their will to power.<sup>69</sup>

Let us now consider, in more detail, how this dynamics structures the psyche of the naturally weaker—or as both Callicles and Nietzsche terms them, the 'slaves'—and their fundamental split or self-alienation. Now, insofar as the constitutive drive of humans is the will to power, and insofar as the naturally weaker or the slaves are in fact impotent with respect to fulfilling this basic need, and insofar as the naturally better or masters *do* manifest this power/potency, the slaves only find their own basic need alive/fulfilled/actualised in the persona of the master (the 'other'). Hence, the slaves find their 'true selves' realised only in the 'other', through looking at the master, who in turn impersonates the constitutive need of a will to power and consequently *becomes an object of desire*.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, as the slaves look at the master as the object of desire, this look simultaneously constitutes the intra-psychic structure of the slaves' own self-awareness: the slaves' self-awareness is seeing themselves *as seen by* the master (the 'other'); the slaves see themselves, formatively, as seen by the master *as weak*.

However, as the human animal is determined by her will to power the slave must now find a way of 'indirectly' fulfilling his basic need—which by now has formed into a desire for, to be like, the other (of the self). This requires an 'unnatural' deployment of power—a perversion of the will to power. For as the slave can never by himself alone take or manifest power, as power always resides with the other, power is taken by congealing together the heard of slaves to form a social structure that centralises power; a social power structure essentially defined by impersonal/supra-individual customs and laws, defined by an impersonal/supra-individual authority or gaze. What has now happened is that the defining, constitutive, and 'natural', 'other' of the masters and their (by the slaves intra-psychically imagined) gaze, has been transmuted into the social power structure and its gaze. That is, the slaves transmute their desire for the master's position and affirmation to a desire for the affirmation of the social gaze of 'the people'. Or, put differently, by creating the social institution and gaze of the 'Law', the slaves take possession of the master through this new, supra-individual Other.

The structure of the slave-subject's psyche is thus always defined or determined in terms of a 'lack'; defined and determined in negative, or as

69 Remember the difference between how the appetites and the social gaze are positioned in Socrates' and Callicles' respective conceptions: both hold the social gaze to be the deep problem, yet while the appetites, as unreason, for Socrates are essentially connected to the love for the people, for Callicles it is the reverse; it is the denial of the appetites that is part of the social gaze in that it is part of the law set up by the impotent concealing their weakness and inferiority.

70 As one might put it, the primary need of the slaves transmutes into desire, a desire for the 'other' (the position of the master).

Nietzsche (1996) would put it, reactive terms. In other words, the basic structure of the slave's psyche is determined by impotence instead of potency, which is what the human animal 'naturally' needs. And not only is the slave's psyche structured on impotence but, consequently, it is structured around a fundamental split or self-alienation. The slave's fundamental psychic split between self and other—the self is always determined by the other—is a self-alienation in that the other is in fact (i) the slave's own fundamental need—the other as master 'possesses' what the slave desires—while (ii) the very gaze of the other—through which the slave sees him-/herself as impotent—is in fact the slave's own gaze upon him-/herself *as seen by the other as master*. The other, that is, the slave's own lack, *is* the slave's perverted desire.<sup>71</sup>

It is of some importance to re-emphasise that the picture I am sketching of the reactive structure of the slave's psyche represents a wholly intra-psychic event. That is to say, the way the slave's psyche is structured around the other as master is not due to the master's own *actual* gaze and valuations of the slave, but rather due to the way the slave comes to, internally, structure the situation. This is how the slave, in his/her perverted way, in fact manifests, in psychic terms, the natural will to power. That is to say, although the slave defines him-/herself by way of the other/master, this is nevertheless only a perverted way in which the slave manifests him-/herself through him-/herself—which is what the master does naturally, actively. The reactive is simply a perversion of the active.

Conversely, then, the structure of the master's psyche differs from the slave's exactly in that it is directly/explicitly structured only from within the individual him-/herself, self-sufficiently and not in relation to, or determined by, the other. The master's psychic constitution lacks, in other words, the complexity and depth of the slave's.<sup>72</sup> That is, the master's psychic constitution altogether lacks

71 "While all noble morality grows from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says no to an 'outside', to an 'other', to a 'non-self': and *this* no is its creative act. The reversal of the evaluating gaze—this *necessary* orientation outwards rather than inwards to the self—belongs characteristically to *ressentiment*. In order to exist at all, slave morality from the outset always needs an opposing, outer world; in physiological terms, it needs external stimuli in order to act—its action is fundamentally reaction." (Nietzsche 1996, p. 22)

72 As Nietzsche notes: "Every instinct which does not vent itself externally *turns inwards*—this is what I call the *internalization* of man: it is at this point that what is later called the 'soul' first develops in man. The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as between two membranes, has been extended and expanded, has acquired depth, breadth, and height in proportion as the external venting of human instinct has been *inhibited*." (Nietzsche 1996, p. 65). Or: "A race of such men of *ressentiment* is bound in the end to become *cleverer* than any noble race, and it will respect cleverness to a completely different degree: that is, as a first condition of existence." (Ibid. p. 24)

the kind of self-awareness (depth) through which the slave always understands him-/herself, in that the master never sees him-/herself as an object *as seen by the other*. The master has, one might even say, no object as a 'self' for itself, as he/she does not have any split between need and fulfilment—or to put it in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, between the real and the imaginary—but is always and completely, in psychic terms, self-sufficient.

Finally, and given that we are still playing the role of Callicles' and Nietzsche's advocate, let us more explicitly thematise the body and place it in this dynamics—with the specific motivation of locating it in the framework of the function 'body' has in *Gorgias*. As one might put it, the body is, originally, the sign of impotence for the slave, who is split between a need and the (im)potency to fulfil it. Hence the body becomes the object, or sign, of this impotence in that the master becomes the embodiment, or sign, of potency and thus the object of desire. As the original sign or body of potency is transmuted from the master to the social power structure and its gaze, the slave, instead of defined and determined by the gaze of the master—which is the gaze of the slave upon him-/herself *as seen by the other as master*—becomes defined and determined by the social gaze—which is the gaze of the slave upon him-/herself *as seen by the social gaze*. That is to say, as power/potency always resides elsewhere, the slave must attempt to be granted power by the other who possesses it. And as the slave never is able to directly/naturally express the fundamental drive, as his/her body (the sign of the soul) is never up to the task, it is always the other's body, or the body defined by the other's gaze, that is desired.

Now seen from such a perspective, the Isles of the Blessed as the final destination for the just soul—where will and desire do not oppose each other, where there is no difference between doing what one wants and doing what one sees fit—is a picture of the soul and its will finally overcoming its impotence. That is to say, it is a fantasy of the slave's will freed from its impotent body; freed from that which signals or manifests the individual's natural weakness and impotence in relation to the naturally strong. Now, finally, on the Isles of the Blessed, the slaves are able to fulfil their needs, as that which placed a wedge between the naturally stronger and weaker—and consequently between the need to fulfil one's appetites and the realisation of this need—is finally abolished. Yet, such a fantasy does not really manage to disentangle itself from its own weakness and impotence. For, whatever notions or ideals the slave mentality produces, it will be expressive of itself, namely it will be weak, inferior—always determined by the other. First, as the liberation of the will from its impotence can come about only through the separation of the soul from the body (death), this very force of liberation remains external to the powers of the individual.



Rather than the liberty of the will being taken or owned—as the master owns it—it is given by fate, by an external force *qua* death; it remains, essentially, passive and not active. Secondly, the access to the Isles of the Blessed is not claimed or taken but rather 'earned', that is, granted to the slave by a higher authority, by someone more powerful, superior, who defines the rationale and values of the rules, the law, and holds the keys to the promised land, namely the social gaze. Again, this is passive rather than active; determined by/through the 'other'. Similarly, during earthly existence, although the weak have, as Callicles and Nietzsche agree, taken over the rule, their souls remain weak because their actual will, that is, their will to be like the naturally stronger, cannot come to expression directly, but only as transmuted and masked in/through convention. So, although convention or law is the means by which the naturally weaker affirm their power and perverted enjoyment, it always remains determined and ruled by the gaze of the other *as the social gaze*—where the power/authority is cemented—and not self-sufficiently by the individuals themselves.

*Truth, reason, and justice as resentment*

The perverse concern with the ascetic ideals arguably identifiable in Plato's *Gorgias*—and more generally in Plato's philosophical system—has further aspects still. For the suspicion I am advocating for here suggests an even darker and more sinister feature internal to the enjoyment internal to Platonic reason and justice.

The final resting place of the Isles of the Blessed—or Paradise, to speak in Christian terms—must surely be a place, a state of mind, as it were, of an overall transcendent enjoyment, or as the saying goes, 'heavenly bliss'. But what exactly does this enjoyment or complete happiness consist in? We have identified the Isles of the Blessed as a place "beyond the reaches of evil", a place where there is no conflict any more between what one wants and what one sees fit to do, that is, a place where desire and the will are not in strife, impotence abolished, and constitutive needs allowed to express themselves unrestrictedly with the potency to fulfil them. However, there is something we need to add now, something that cannot go unnoticed as we read the eschatological tale. I am of course referring to the prison of payment and retribution and the necessary suffering and pain—the essential torment—it carries in its name.

Is there not something about the suffering, pain, and torment of those condemned to the prison of retribution in Hades that makes the "complete happiness" of the righteous ones all the more intense? Can one not hear the tormented cries of the 'vicious' and 'unjust' at the shores of the Isles of the Blessed humming in the background, as the completely happy souls stroll around

engaging in whatever their wills desire, all impotence abolished? Or, if there is a sound-barrier in Hades between the Isles of the Blessed and the prison of retribution, Plato himself is certainly well aware of the existence of the tormented cries, and they seem to form—how could they not?—an inseparable part of what it means to be on the Isles of the Blessed, what it means to be in 'complete happiness'. The ascetic ideal is, then, not only focused on the attainment and fulfilment of pleasures—the abolishment of impotence. Rather, the very pleasures of this ideal themselves seem to derive an essential portion of their vitality from vengeful retribution. That is to say, the exercise of—actual and dreamt of—envious retribution seems to be internal to the very enjoyment of the ascetic ideal. In Hades, after the final judgement, the unjust souls are sent to the “prison of payment and retribution” where they await their just punishment. And what is a just punishment? For those whose souls are still curable “their benefits come to them, both here and in Hades, by way of pain and suffering, for there is no other way to get rid of injustice” (525 b). Those again whose souls are incurable undergo “for all time the most grievous, intensely painful and frightening sufferings for all their errors, simply strung up there in the prison in Hades as examples, visible warnings to unjust men who are arriving” (525 c).

The dialogical exchange between Socrates and his interlocutors established that it is better to suffer just punishment than to escape it because an unjust soul is able neither to pursue nor to fulfil its purpose. The just punishment corrects, as it were, the organisation of the soul. But, one might ask, why is it that a soul is corrected only through “punishment”—why use this concept?—and, moreover, why does the punishment have to be one of “pain and suffering”? Why, for instance, could not Hades be a place where the unjust, especially the incurable souls, are simply put out of existence or condemned to a place less glorious than the Isles of the Blessed, yet not to eternal torment and suffering? Would this not function as an example just as well? Why would it not be enough to be put before the choice of either repenting one’s sins and gaining access to complete happiness or not repenting and ending up, for all eternity, in something less than complete happiness, yet not eternal suffering; wouldn’t the mere awareness of an eternal lack of complete happiness—when it was possible to achieve—become suffering enough?

Why the pain and torment? What is it that makes this the key to a healthy and just soul? Why is it not for instance love and friendship, compassion and caring that transfigures the soul from an unjust to a just one? Why is not prison, both here on earth and in Hades, a place where the unjust souls are invited to engage in philosophical discussion and other sound activities, or, if they prefer not to, then left to stroll along the court yard? Is it that there is a shortage of resources in Hades? Is it simply because we lack resources here on earth that we treat the unjust as we do? And how exactly, one might ask, is it that tormenting

pain and suffering manages to make the soul just? Was it not philosophy, the active pursuit of truth through discursive reason, which was supposed to do that? Conversely, if pain and suffering is the only way to make an unjust soul just, shouldn't Plato have been obliged to place suffering and pain as the ultimate practice of human life, rather than philosophy—or are they the same?

Considerations such as these make it quite hard not to read the notion of justice and the (Platonic) project of rational reason as underpinned by a deep and constitutive resentment, by an envious hatred and desire for revenge. Does not the name “prison of payment and retribution” say it all! There is namely something about the tormenting treatment wished upon the unjust that quite evidently seems to function as a kind of reassuring and comforting ‘psychological mechanism’ for the ‘just’ individuals in their predicament here on this earth: they will get their revenge and their reward, not only here on earth where their ‘natural’ powers are always insufficient, but a final, total revenge and reward in the hereafter. This seems to be clear also in the suggestion that a tormenting punishment is the only way to make the soul just. There is namely a picture suggesting itself here in which the soul is cleansed of its injustice by breaking down, as a mind breaks down in torture. In other words, the picture we get here is one where the unjust soul is redeemed (if possible) by breaking down to the point of complete disintegration, faced only with the choice to either disintegrate or to accept a new object of desire—the Law—provided to by the new authority ‘Reason’, the god and protector of ‘the inferior’.<sup>73</sup> Those who accept this new object of desire, or are able to transfer, or transmute, their actual desires to this new object, are granted access to the Isles of the Blessed and complete happiness amongst the just, that is, amongst those whose revenge and hatred they have just had a taste of. Those again who have no place in their souls for ‘justice’, or who have hurt/shamed the just too deeply; who have been too shameless and too successful in their pursuit of that which all dream of but only a few can realise—for what else than the bitterness of the resentment filled soul can judge another’s soul to be incurable?—are left dangling, for all time, in the very twilight moment of their soul’s disintegration in their “most grievous, intensely painful and frightening sufferings” (525 c-d). *An eternal revenge is an eternal bitterness; never will the one be free of his pain and suffering, never will the other be free of his hatred—and suffering. How happy are not the dwellers of the Isles of the Blessed in their eternal hatred!*

<sup>73</sup> I think Orwell's *1984* (Orwell 1977) includes one of the best and most horrific illustrations of torture as a means of ‘mind-control’. When the protagonist Winston Smith is caught and refuses to cooperate with the powers that be, he is tortured to the point of breaking (psychically disintegrating), and in the final moment concedes the torturer (which is what it means to ‘break’ in torture). At this very point Smith transmutes his (object of) desire from his lover Julia to Oceania, the dystopian regime that has tortured him.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Plato concludes that “the majority” of those destined to suffer through all time—and to feed and to feel the eternal hatred of the just—“come from the ranks of tyrant, kings, potentates, and those active in the affairs of the cities, for these people commit the most grievous and impious errors because they’re in a position to do so” (525 d). Because they’re in a position to do so. How scandalous! It should have been Plato who enjoyed such a position of unquestionable power and authority—whispering in the ears of the rulers (cf. *Republic*)—because he would, of course, have used it wisely, justly. And in the afterlife, he will finally get that position, as his eschatological tale tells us.

The resentment of the ascetic ideal is of course not only directed externally, namely towards those who in fact enjoy the natural potency that gives access to the fulfilment of pleasures and generates the dynamics of social positioning. It is also directed internally, that is, towards the need to unrestrictedly fulfil the appetites, which ‘naturally’ call upon us but which we are unable to fully answer. There is then a sense in which the appetites themselves and the *part* of us in which they reside, become, *because of our inability to satisfy these appetites*, objects of our hatred. We discipline and master them and thus try to affirm—by splitting a part of the self, namely ‘reason’, from the ‘whole’ self—a self of (will)-power rather than of impotence. In other words, in our resentment we create a self of (will)-power—rather than our ‘naturally’ impotent self—by creating a new and self-defined terrain of power, that is, by creating an other in and of the self: we create ascetic mastery, ascetic self-mastery, at the cost of becoming alien, strangers, other, to ourselves; reason or self is separated from ‘body’, from need.

Seen from this perspective, ‘body’ as the seat or “tomb” of the soul, in turn becomes the prime target of this hatred of the appetites, of the ‘sensuous world’. The body bears the perceptible manifestations of all that is against reason, or rather, all that manifests or bears the sign of impotence: a mouth that enjoys food and drink, or that can fail to do so; an ensemble of joints and parts that can lavishly mesmerise, or fail to do so; an ensemble of joints and parts that can take what it wants/needs, or fail to do so; an ensemble of joints and parts that forms the admired and envied *object* of the other's gaze, or fails to do so; and perhaps most fundamentally—if one follows the Christian tradition of Augustine all the way to the Freudian revolution and beyond (cf. Foucault 1978)—the organs of generation and the erotic body that can be potent and desirable or impotent ('lacking') and undesirable. The hatred of our impotence, in the narrative we are now considering, is manifest in Plato's suggestion that only when the soul has been separated from the body can truth and justice prevail and the soul reveal its true nature. It deepens, arguably, through the moral norms—and especially through the intensified moralisation of sexuality—of Augustinian Christianity and its monastic core. It travels through Descartes' heroic and (evidently) successful attempt to unify the soul and externalise the landscape of the irrational solely to the functions of the body—making the 'mechanical body' our

core ‘other’—and, finally, finds its place in contemporary naturalism, where the process of externalisation has to a large extent managed to hide the moral-existential constitution of this self-split/-alienation and its associated impotence and hatred/ressentiment, picturing the soul’s relationship to the body solely as an epistemic or structural problem.

### **Injustice as Self-Inflicted Pain and Suffering**

The preceding subsection articulated how it would affect our understanding of Plato’s *Gorgias*—and perhaps more importantly, how it would affect our understanding of the inner-outer conflict more generally—if we took seriously some of the accusations Socrates faces in the *Gorgias* from his interlocutors, especially Callicles. So, according to Callicles, the prospect of having law and discipline determine how one should think and feel threatens and distorts the soul’s own truth and self-determination; its direct, active, and undistorted expression. Hence, Callicles seems to voice the same kind of worry and tension as does Plato, namely a worry that the self or soul is split between, on the one hand, a direct, naked, undistorted self(-expression) and, on the other hand, a self conditioned and moulded by a fundamentally flawed or corrupt concern for the social gaze. Or does he? What makes *Gorgias* interesting is, of course, that Plato seems to be quite aware of exactly these potential accusations against and questions internal to his thoughts. After all, he gives these accusations and questions an active voice through Callicles. —Perhaps we might even read the dialogue as Plato’s struggle with his suspicions about his own thoughts. Now, what would it in turn mean to read Plato in such a way that the idea of the prison of retribution does *not* amount to deep resentment? Or, that the notion of reason and the good are *not* interpreted as masks of a perverted will for power and enjoyment? This is the question I will pursue in this final section of the chapter, and it will involve a kind of re-thinking or re-articulation and expansion of those ideas I have developed in earlier sections, a re-thinking/articulation and expansion that will continue in the next chapter as well.

### *Grammar as the rational-moral order of words*

The central problem with Callicles’—and with Polus’ and Gorgias’—accusations against Socrates was that they were unable to provide any sound rational justifications for their claims, while Socrates produced them like hay on a meadow; they seemed to irresistibly crop up out of the very soil of discursive

reasoning, from the very grammar of the interlocutors' own claims. The most worrying thing for Callicles' case was that the dialogue seemed to illustrate that his whole notion of the "just by nature" and the associated notions of the 'naturally more worthier', 'natural will to power', were tied to his "love for the people". That is to say, Callicles' notion of "just by nature" seemed in fact to be completely determined by the social gaze, that is, by the desire to be affirmed by 'the people'. After all, as already noted, it seems that Callicles' appraisal of the tyrant and the craft of oratory was simply an attempt to 'rationally' justify his fearful struggle to secure himself against mistreatment and humiliation, as what he really longed for, what he really wanted, was to be loved as himself by others as themselves, which grammatically means that he desired to be not-unjust<sup>74</sup>.

Let us once more consider what Callicles' inconsistency—his dissonance of the soul—consisted in, this time adding some new dimensions. One aspect of the dissonance comes out in Callicles' attempt to define what he means by "just by nature" and the "naturally more worthier", which suggests that, as the naturally better persons are always active and never reactive, whatever they happen to think, feel, do, *is* the very criterion of what is 'just' and 'good'. Socrates, on the other hand, suggests that the good and the just are tied to, cannot resist, rational justification—which, as I have argued above, centrally means taking responsibility, in relation to others, for what one says and does. But what are Socrates and Callicles engaged in? Well, exactly in discursive reasoning. So, one might ask, if Callicles sincerely thought that the highest good is to be like the "naturally more worthier", why is he then trying to justify his claims? What business does the naturally worthier have with the process of justification, if whatever he happens to feel, think, do, etc. *is* the good, *is* justified? And still, Callicles is there, desperately attempting to convince Socrates of the legitimacy of his thoughts, and of his own persona. In other words, Callicles neither does nor knows or acknowledges what he actually wants. That is to say, he neither stays true to his claims about truth and the good, nor does he dare to fully participate in discursive reasoning, as he resists the voice of reason.

Here is another aspect of the dissonance: In failing to provide any sound rational justifications for the tie between "by nature just" and the "good", Callicles fails to give sense, to provide meaning to his claims. And what is it to provide meaning, in the Platonic sense I have suggested? *It is to be able to tie one's soul, undivided, to whatever claim, belief, assertion, one professes.* An undivided soul is, in turn, one that is good; meaning is tied to the good, and the good, so rational justification seems to confirm, is grammatically tied to justice, while justice is, so I have suggested, tied to love and care, to the real of desire and the undivided

74 By this 'not-unjust' I simply mean to point out that Callicles' real desire is not as such to be just, but rather that the grammar of his desire includes that he does not really want to be unjust.

soul; *the good is tied to the good*. Moreover, what Plato seems to be indicating is that meaning is tied to a moral order *because* the human soul is essentially tied to the good. Put otherwise, the good of the soul—its real will-desire—inevitably comes to expression, inevitably latches onto the grammar of one's expressions, unconsciously.

Why do I keep on repeating this? Because it is important to keep in mind that Callicles' failure to give sense to his notion of "nature" —the very emptiness of the concept—is the way in which his attempt to tie his soul to it is expressive of the split nature of his soul; expressive of his internal split between his displaced desire and his will, between his 'conscious' and his (repressed) unconscious self. In other words, the dissonance of Callicles' soul does not *as such* reside in that he fails to stay true to his notion of "nature". This is, as one might put it, simply a symptom. Rather, the dissonance here is that his notion of "nature" never even had the meaning Callicles 'attempts' to give it; it is this *attempt* to give it a displaced meaning that is the meaninglessness of it. The point is not, then, that "nature" is something that is lost to the speaking, rational being, and that it cannot be made sense of. For the failure to give meaning here is not essentially that the notion of "nature" is incomprehensible, in the sense of being 'outside of meaning'. Rather, the sense of the senseless is that "nature" is in fact construed, by Callicles, as an attempt to rationally justify his desire to secure social affirmation from 'the people'; "nature" is itself a rationalisation of this split (in) desire, and displaces desire by way of the 'sense' it tries to give "nature". The meaninglessness of "nature" is, in other words, that its meaning is something else than it is made out to be; that the actual tie between his words and his soul (his will-desire) is, for Callicles, elsewhere than in "nature", elsewhere than in his conscious assertions, and revealed to us in the grammar (the unconscious) of his claims.

Because meaning is tied to the way in which the soul is tied to the good, the process of revealing or searching for meaning has the character of acknowledgement more than that of discovering completely and radically new information. Or, as Plato would put it, perhaps in a somewhat confused manner, philosophy is a process of recollection [*anamnesis*] (cf. Plato 1997e; 1997f). This is important to note, not least because it qualifies the notion that language has a moral order tied to it in a particular, as it were, non-conservative fashion—which does not mean that it makes it 'liberal'. To put it simply, because meaning—that is, what one is *really* saying, what one *really* wants to say—is acknowledged in the process of tying one's soul, undivided, to what is said and done, meaning (or the good) cannot be instantiated in any external authority, custom, or law. This does not mean that a custom, a law, a convention, or another person, could not be right or true, or good or just. Perhaps it, or he/she, is so. However, for this custom or law, or the words of another person, to have their meaning manifest,

for them to become meaningful *for someone*, they must be able to tie themselves to the soul of an individual without dissonance. The question is of course all the time what any given dissonance consists in. This is why meaning is always tied to a *search for meaning*. By this I mean to say that there is a kind of essential openness to meaning (and being) in that it cannot be predetermined what kinds of ties words and reason can make (or fail to make) with the soul (the good), ties (or failures) that can again and again reveal afresh what we need to acknowledge about ourselves in our shared lives with others. —I want to say: the question of meaning announces itself indefinitely over and over again. So, whatever claims to meaning, to the true, or the good, someone, or something (a custom, a law), might come with, and independently of how meaningful, or true, or good these claims might actually be, they can never close themselves to the open process of *searching for meaning* without abandoning the goodness they lay claim to. If a claim to meaning resists or suppresses open scrutiny *done in good faith*, it is a sign of its own corruption, falsehood, meaninglessness. In this sense, there is no authority to meaning, except the extent to which individuals—between each other—are able to tie their whole being to what is said and done.<sup>75</sup>

However, it is exactly at this point that we come face to face with the *impotence* of reason, especially if it is understood in a displaced or, as it were, independent or self-sufficient manner. For imagine Callicles and Polus engaging in a ‘Socratic examination’ in order to figure out the nature of the just. Would they not produce justifications for their desire for social affirmation and the associated fear of social humiliation (loss of affirmation), rather than for any ‘rationally sound’ (‘actually good’) notion of justice? And, would not whatever justifications they came up with seem completely sound to them? Obviously, Plato would insist that such (false) ‘soundness’ comes with the necessary cost of suppressing/repressing ‘true reason’, which inevitably, unconsciously, lingers on in the grammar of expressions. But what can Plato offer us as a remedy; what can he offer us that would be better? He offers us Socrates. But what does this mean? Or; what is it about Socrates that can promise more than ‘false’ justifications?

This is the topic of the remainder of this chapter. That is to say, we will now attempt to once more get into view, in a somewhat altered light, the relationship between reason, the good, and the will, as I suggest it can be traced in Plato’s *Gorgias*.

75 I develop this point in more detail, and from a slightly different perspective, in the next chapter.



*Conscience and the prison of retribution*

I have tried to develop some thoughts about how we might come to see, or why we might have reasons to think, that Plato suggests that the moral order internal to the grammar of (Socrates' interlocutors') claims answer to our (to the interlocutors') *actual* care for others, the real of desire, and how the distorting "love for the people" (struggle for social affirmation) is entangled with it. I want to continue with this theme now and to argue for an alternative reading of the eschatological tale and the "the prison of payment and retribution", one that does not amount to resentment. Rather, what I will suggest is that the unjust person's tormented fate in the 'ultimate judgement' is bound to the real of the soul's desire and, consequently, essentially self-inflicted. Put otherwise, I will try to show how radically different the whole story becomes if one reads the prison of retribution as signalling bad conscience, which in turn indicates that the unity between reason, the good, and the will is in some sense and to some extent informed by or rooted in our care for each other; the way in which other persons, in some basic manner, address us.

What do I mean by self-inflicted pain and suffering? Take for instance the case of anger. Now let us say that in my anger and fury I come to act so aggressively that I break one of the windows at home. Now did I really want to do this, or did I simply do what I saw fit to do (if one can even say this) *in* my anger? That is to say, did I really want a cold breeze running through my apartment, to have to quickly come up with some makeshift solution to keep some of the cold out, to put down a notable sum of money to have my window repaired? Did I really want to act out my anger this way, to have it, as it were, take full control over me? And perhaps even more importantly, did I feel, as it were, fully at home in my anger, or did it divide me, did it alienate me from myself? *If* the answer to these questions was 'no, I was not alienated from myself' and 'yes, this is exactly what I wanted!', and if this was *in fact* true in that, say, a Socratic examination did not reveal a dissonance in my soul—that my conscious claims were not in conflict with the actual grammar of my words—*then* my acting this way would have been quite rational (as far as has been discerned) and not at all 'simply' steered by my anger. In short, to the extent I did not do what I wanted, I did not act rationally, and to the extent I did act as I wanted, I did act rationally.

Now let us say that my young son was witnessing this event. And, let us assume, quite reasonably, that my acting this way caused a certain fear and terror in him, a fear and terror I could clearly see in his eyes. Or, more generally, let us say that in my anger and fury—or to vary the example, in my callous pursuit of social positioning—I hurt and injure another person, deeply scaring her and perhaps causing some degree of trauma. Is the terror I see in the other's face something I wanted (to result from my actions), or did I, in letting myself be

driven by my 'passions', do something I really did not want to do? We might all at some point in our lives have derived pleasure from causing terror in another person. Indeed, do we not need, unfortunately, to acknowledge how pervasively we tend to derive a kind of callous joy from others' miseries, misfortunes, terror, and torment?

As I have argued, I think that Plato, rightly, means to say that we cannot 'really' want the suffering of others *per se*, although we can want to cause pain and suffering to the other *if* it in fact benefits, is good for, the other. I will return to this issue in due time, but the main point now is simply that if I am *de facto* disturbed and divided by the terror and fear I see in my child's eyes when acting out my anger, then there is a sense in which I did not want to do what I did. To the extent that I cannot, on some level, bear the pain and suffering of my child, to the extent that the *reasons* for this torment in my child's face divides me, I cannot be said, grammatically, to have done what I wanted to. This now sets the basic framework for my suggestion of how to read the claim in Plato's *Gorgias* and especially the eschatological tale of the necessity of pain and suffering for the unjust, wicked, callous, soul, as essentially *self-inflicted*.

When one breaks one's own window, one will suffer the unpleasant consequences of one's actions. Such suffering, and such 'practical consequences' are, of course, categorically different from the pain and suffering one will feel when acknowledging and facing the suffering and terror in one's victim's eyes. The difference lies essentially in that the conflict that arises in the soul when one sees the pain and suffering in the other is not due to any consequences, as in the case of the broken window, but rather arises because of the very terror in the other's eyes as such.<sup>76</sup> Here one might say, borrowing a formulation from Emmanuel Lévinas, that "the face [of the other] is meaning all by itself." (Lévinas & Nemo 1985, p. 86) However, while quite different in nature, both of these sufferings are self-inflicted on the part of the 'wrongdoer'. In breaking the window, one brings the cold and other unpleasant practical consequences (and potential self-alienation) onto oneself through one's own hand. Similarly, when causing suffering and terror in another person one brings pain and suffering, that is, bad conscience and the torment it inflicts upon the soul, onto oneself because one has gone against the very way in which one actually cares for the other—the way one is addressed by the other. As one might put it, with reference to Plato, negating the will of one's soul is analogous to negating the order or composition of one's body when one produces a self-inflicted wound.

76 It might of course be pointed out that insofar as one's anger, when breaking a window, alienates oneself *from oneself*, the internal, self-inflicted, 'retribution' that this generates is, just as in the case of seeing terror and fear in one's victim, not due to any consequences of the action, but rather internal to the very act itself.

Now then, if injustice and irrationality (understood in the Platonic sense I have tried to develop) produces self-inflicted suffering, then the prison of retribution in Plato's eschatological tale could be read as the allegorical 'place' from which the soul cannot escape its conscience (the real of desire) behind deceitful social appearances and their associated false 'justifications'. Or; the prison of payment and retribution is the 'place' where, because of the soul's nakedness, one cannot any longer reduce the other, in an egoistic manner, to a mere means to an end (the search for invulnerability through affirmation, and injustice), but must rather see the actual (moral) reality of one's relationship to the other. It is, in other words, a place where those who have wronged others must face all the pain and suffering *in their souls caused by themselves*, before they can once more act in tune with themselves and the fundamental bearing others have upon them; their true desire-will. Or, put otherwise, they suffer because it is painful to see, to acknowledge, and to go through, all the suffering one has caused others; *one, as it were, suffers the pain and terror of the other as it has been imprinted in one's soul, in the 'real of one's desire'.*

*"The good is the last thing to be seen"*

While we might say that in being unjust, that is, in causing pain, terror, or something bad to another, one is in fact also causing self-inflicted pain and suffering to oneself, questions remain about the relationship between reason and the heart, as it were. For, while I cannot but feel the weight of the terror I find in the other's face, there is something to be said about the relationship between this terror—the evil of it as we are 'directly' moved or touched by it—and reason, and, consequently, the will. Put otherwise, Plato seems to be saying that reflective utilisation of reason—the grammatical search for meaning—cannot be *excluded* from determining what is and what is not our actual will, that is, what is actually rational and good.

There seems to be *something* right about this. For instance, sometime ago my son hurt himself quite badly, leaving the wounded body part severely sore. So, every time we had to tend to the wound, my son would burst out in fearful tears and hysterically attempt to avoid treatment. Now it might be that the terror in my son's eyes and in his whole body during the first critical days of tending to the wound—when the pain was clearly severe—was (in fact) different from the kind of terror a child exhibits when faced with 'real'/'actual' threat and terror. Perhaps, yet I could not make this distinction in those moments, as the terror I saw in his eyes and his body was, well, terror. Now the crucial point here is of course that the direct witnessing of this terror and fear in my son's eyes gave rise, in me, to a desire *not* to have him feel this terror and pain. —Internal to the

seeing of the other's terror and pain is the desire *not* to cause pain and terror. Yet, to have refrained from causing him such pain and terror would of course have been completely irrational and destructive, as it would not have been a way of caring for him, but would in fact have led to much graver health risks and, consequently, worse pain and suffering.

The same could be said about the state of the soul. At least Plato wants to say so, and I believe with certain right. For when someone has a corrupt or ill soul, when someone has displaced her desire to a large extent and become severely self-alienated, we *want* this person to become good, 'healthy', and we want this consciously so precisely to the extent that we are actually ready to care for this person, and have the courage to do so. However, facing the contradictions, the dissonance, the corruption, the evil, in one's soul is a terrible thing—in some sense for corrupt reasons of course; the hardness of facing up to the dissonance of the soul is part of the very displacement itself—and might cause deep anxiety and resistance, which in turn easily gets transmuted into other 'symptoms'. 'Protecting' a person from such pain and suffering would, nevertheless, be irrational and lacking in goodness, as one would not in fact be helping the other, which is what one *wants* to do. This is what I take Plato to be implying.<sup>77</sup>

There seems to be, in other words, something true about Plato's suggestion that correcting or healing a certain ill might be in need of some pain and suffering. Consequently, there seems to be a sense in which we can say that one can *want* to inflict pain and suffering to the other. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that we do not *want*, cannot really *want*, pain and suffering *as such* for the other. We can, in other words, *want* to inflict pain and suffering on the other only insofar as it is part of our care and love for the other. —The *reasons* I have for inflicting pain and suffering on my son when treating his wound, are essentially tied to my caring for him. Moreover, such caring requires that one is prepared to go through, with the other person, the pain and suffering that might be needed in certain moments.

What role does reason exactly play here? Arguably many different ones. One role it plays is that in order to be able to care properly for the other person we

77 Although it is of course true that one must be somewhat attentive as to how much a person is able to handle at a given moment, as one does not want the other person completely break down and become e.g. psychotic or self-destructive. On the other hand, though, it is not at all clear how one can control such things. Nor is it always clear to what extent it in fact is desirable that a person avoids harsh psychic difficulties. —As far as I can see, facing up to one's displacements *means* finding oneself 'at the bottom of one's pit'. As long as one has not reached the 'bottom', one can always fall deeper, or learn to live with, learn to manage, one's displacements. There is, however, no general rule as to where or when one reaches one's 'bottom'. To find oneself 'at the bottom' is to (finally) acknowledge one's predicament and that the 'abyss' is self-inflicted, self-created.

need, in many cases, to know *how*, for instance, to treat a wound, or how to tend to a person's anxieties, depression, etc. Here is another role reason plays. Although we do not need any justifications for why we care for the other, we nevertheless always have *reasons* for why we inflict pain and suffering. And in cases when our desire is not displaced, we know or understand that we inflict the pain and suffering *because* we care. Our reasons *is*, inevitably and grammatically, the good (independently of whether they are, in fact, good). So causing pain and suffering when tending to another's ills or wounds is rational and good as our reasons, our rational justifications, do not show themselves to be unsound, exactly insofar as our inflictions of pain and suffering does not divide us from what we really want and desire, namely to care for the other (the real of desire).

There are many additional ways in which discursive reason enters the picture. For instance, another person might think quite differently from me about how to care for another person, or think that it is sentimental, self-deceptive, to believe that one really does want to, or should want to, care for others. And discussing such things with another person might obviously reveal to me that I have indeed mistreated e.g. my son by either having false or insufficient know-how as to how to properly tend to a wound, or by having in fact caused unnecessary pain and suffering to him because I secretly derived a certain pleasure out causing pain as part of my vengeful bitterness towards him or some other person. But, my lack of proper know-how might not at all undermine the soundness of my reasons for the infliction of pain and suffering, to the extent that this lack was not tied to, say, my vengeful bitterness. I simply just had the wrong, or insufficient, 'information' as to what the proper means to my end is. My possible vengeful bitterness, on the other hand, would undermine the soundness of my reasons for inflicting pain, given that the rational examination was conducted in a properly thorough manner. Moreover, many times we might be openly unclear about what is a good way of caring for the other, as for instance when one has a hard time clearly seeing where to draw certain lines with what to allow one's child to do and what not. In such open unclarity one might also suspect or be uncertain about one's own motives, and to what extent these motives and one's attitude underpins one's unclarity. Here there are things to think about, an understanding and meaning to be searched for, to be acknowledge.<sup>78</sup>

It is certainly not my intention to give any exhaustive account of the different ways in which reason enters our lives with others. Rather, the aim here is centrally to point out that there is a sense in which we always have *reasons* for what we *do* when we engage with others, and that these reasons gain a central

<sup>78</sup> See the discussion on the difference between unclarity and displacement on pp. 185-186 below

role especially when what we do in one way or another brings about suffering in others (and in oneself). To repeat, we do not *want*, cannot *really* want, pain and suffering *as such* for the other. The *reasons* I have, the justification I would give, for inflicting pain and suffering on, for instance, my son when treating his wound, is essentially tied to my caring for him. In this sense my reasons, my justification, is part and parcel of what makes it possible for me to morally-existentially bear the pain and suffering I witness in my son's face.

However, here we come to the disquieting features of 'reason'. Namely, the fact that reasons, justifications, are part and parcel of what makes it morally-existentially bearable for us to inflict pain and suffering on the other *also* constitutes the 'dark side' of reason and rational justifications. For if doing what is unjust, displaced, bad, or evil, is, on some basic level, morally-existentially unbearable to our souls, then justification can be called upon, or is rather necessarily called upon, in order to make one's evil, one's displacements, bearable—for oneself. In short, whenever evil (displacement) is done (or even thought), and as long as one does not (dare to) acknowledge it as an evil (displacement), one will (have to) produce reasons for why, say, the unjust infliction of pain and suffering on another person is nevertheless 'right', 'just', and how this 'in the end' in fact benefits the victim (or why the victim justly 'deserved it'), or how it benefits oneself, others, society, etc. We always 'want the good' and this is why reason cannot but attempt to justify evil. This is, as far as I can see, what makes a notion such as 'necessary evil' (cf. Gaita 2004, see also Toivakainen 2017) grammatically possible, and so persistent.

This then brings us to the following question, and to the impasse of a certain idea of reason: how exactly are we going to be able to discriminate between false and true, or just and unjust, or good and evil reasons and justifications? That is to say, how are we going to be able to discriminate between reason and deception, or philosophy and oratory? For obviously, we cannot place our hopes here in discursive reason 'alone', or 'as such'. As I noted, if Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, engage in a 'Socratic examination' amongst each other, they will surely cook up the most elaborate justifications for their desire for social affirmation, and be quite content with whatever arguments the discussion produces. They will be, so to speak, blind to the unsoundness (the actual grammar) of their claims exactly because their blindness is their sight. Similarly, if I am bent on doing evil or displacing my desire, and if my interlocutor is bent on the same or some other corruption, then we will produce rational justifications that will seem completely legitimate to us, as these are exactly our way of expressing or articulating our evil, our displacements. We might of course add that Socratic discursive reasoning comes with the requirement 'say only what you sincerely believe' (Vlastos 1991; Wallgren 2006), and that this entails a constant self-examination and search for what one truly wants. However, such requirements are nevertheless completely empty *as long as there is no will* to actually pursue

truth, as long as one is determined only to justify, reason for, what one sees fit; as long as one is not ready to acknowledge one's displacements. We need a Socrates, that is, someone who actually has a good will and the courage to live according to it. And this will take us only half way, as it were, as truth and goodness needs the naked openness *between* souls. (Perhaps one might say that to come half way is to trace the symptoms of the displacement of the 'real of the soul's desire' as they manifest in the rational inconsistencies emerging in Socratic examinations.) This is, I suggest, what Plato invests in the figure of Socrates, and what in the end underpins the promise of philosophy; that truth is possible for those with a good will. And, it is this goodness, *and the level of goodness one is actually open to*, which sets the limit to how close we can get to the truth about ourselves and others. The moral order of things is manifest there in the grammar, in the use of our words, in our lives with others. But it is only our goodness, that is, our will, our real desire (for the good), which lets us access it. Or, put otherwise, as long as we displace our "naked" desire for the other's desire and seek to secure the desire of the other through social affirmation, rational scrutiny will not work. Or, better yet, rational scrutiny will not be rational, but rather simply expressive of the attempt to manage and justify our displacement, our split.

It is of course a centrally important trait about our souls, about us, that we seem to inescapably strive to justify, rationalise, our evil. For what it shows, to my mind, is that we cannot hate or be evil wholeheartedly: we need to mask our evil as in the end justified, as good. And, as I have tried to suggest, this is so because we cannot escape our fundamental care for each other: we need to make our evil morally-existentially bearable. In short, we are always split *in* our evil, *in* our displacement. Yet, this very same trait is also a source of discomfort and worry. For what it also means is that reason is perhaps the core source enabling—making morally-existentially manageable—our displacements and the deepening, systematisation, and institutionalisation of these displacements, and the evil to which they tend to amount. In short, reason deprived of good will—reason in service of displacement—is perhaps the most dangerous of all human capacities.<sup>79</sup> And the more intelligent, the more creative and powerful the mind of a corrupt and fearful soul is, all the more successful, all the more convincing and persuasive, will such displacements and evil be—to those who are ready to invest their own fears and displacements in evil and injustice.

It is more or less here that I want to locate Plato's suggestion in the allegory of the cave that "the good is the last thing to be seen" and that which "is the

79 Although the worry expressed here has affinities with the worry about the intrinsic connections between reason and domination expressed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) in their classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I have chosen not to dwell on these affinities, and the related distances and differences here.

cause of all that is correct and beautiful" (*Republic*, 517 b-c). For this is more or less exactly what I have been arguing, namely that reason cannot serve the pursuit of truth, of meaning, without the good (will); it is the goodness that makes the truth true. It is perhaps also here that we find the deadlock of a certain fantasy about the potentials of philosophy or reason when it is imagined that there is a method, or an argument, a magical key, which can be found out by reason 'alone' and that would release us from untruth/distortion and unite us with (the meaning of) truth<sup>80</sup>. But what could it be? We cannot, I claim, *produce* a good will through reason 'alone', nor can we reason to truth without a good will. As one might put it, and as I think Plato means it, reason without the good (will) is not reason proper.

How then can we become good? How can we become whole, non-split, and thus properly 'rational'? It is perhaps not surprising that Christian doctrine claims that the human soul cannot save itself and is wholly dependent on the mercy of God. I mean, there seems to be some truth to this thought, although just as such the claim cannot have any more than a kind of symbolic meaning, at least for me. Perhaps the value of the doctrine lies in that it suggests that goodness and truth/meaning are *absolutely radical*, and are simply unreachable, unrealisable, without it, with anything less than it. —We might perhaps feel hopeless at the prospect that there is nothing that can *secure* a good will and thus secure that we (can) aligned with truth. That is to say, we might feel terrified at the prospect that we are in the end individually responsible for this goodness and our relationship to truth, just as we feel terrified with respect to the openness and vulnerability of—the lack of any guarantee of reciprocity in—desire. Why is it so difficult to bear such responsibility? Why do we feel so hopeless in the face of it?

### *The inescapable weight of the soul*

Let us now return to the prison of payment and retribution. As I already suggested, if Plato connects together reason, the will, and the good along the lines I have been suggesting, then it seem quite plausible to understand the pain and suffering of those condemned to the prison of retribution as self-inflicted. More precisely, one might understand the whole eschatological tale as a kind of allegory of the end point to one's self-deceit (see the next chapter for more on

80 As noted by for instance Lloyd (1984), it is characteristic of modern philosophy, at least since Bacon and Descartes, to think that a correct *method* will infallibly or automatically yield true knowledge, independently of the moral status of the 'knower'. As if the moral corruption inherent in our human conceptions could be done away with through the *method*—but then again, what guarantees the correctness of the method?



this) and, consequently, the pain and suffering found in the prison of retribution is the pain and suffering one faces when, finally, one cannot but face the unbearableness of the pain and suffering, the injustice, one has brought upon others, without the shield of false, of bad willed, justifications. Moreover, this would also indicate an intrinsic link between the body (as the object) of the social gaze—which is stripped off in Hades—and false (bad willed) justification—which is also non-existent in Hades. That is to say, the “love for the people”—the attempt to secure the care of others through affirmation of one’s public persona—cannot but utilise false justifications in order to make the inherently self-deceptive and displaced love bearable, while false justifications—in the name of the “love for the people”—cannot but produce the fabric of (the social) ‘body’; the object of the social gaze.

How about those doomed to eternal punishment then, those whose souls cannot be saved? At first sight, this sounds terrible. How could one say, without some sinister bitterness, that there are, possibly, those who have completely lost sight of truth and goodness? Yet, there might be something important embedded here. In the reading of the eschatological tale that I now attribute to Plato—perhaps over-generously—the pain and suffering in the prison of retribution is nothing but the unbearable weight of the injustices, the displacements one has committed. This, in turn, would entail, in my reading, that even in the hopeless cases envisioned by Plato, the soul, despite being ‘forever lost’, never loses its very core, that is, its essential foundation of goodness and justice, or as I have tried to say, its fundamental care or love for others. For it is exactly this core (the conscience) of the soul that makes pain and suffering possible in the prison of retribution; without it the *soul* cannot suffer its injustices—although the body can suffer all kinds of sufferings without conscience, but then again, in Hades there is no body to inflict pain upon. What then makes these souls eternally lost is, as I suggested already earlier, that their hearts have turned into stone. Or, more precisely, that the soul has in some sense sealed itself off through an absolute or ultimate choice never to accept itself, that is, never to accept its essential tie to the other, while simultaneously never able to fully escape or negate this tie, this real of the soul’s desire; a kind of eternal twilight in a phantasmatic desire to negate the un-negatable. What is of central importance in this ‘picture’, it seems to me, is how it points towards a radical idea of individual freedom, and consequently, individual responsibility. That is, it points towards an idea that there is no ultimate power or authority over and above our very own souls determining the fate of our souls. We are fully free to do whatever we ‘see fit’ with our souls and their desire—even attempt to fully deny them—and we are fully responsible, individually, for them, for our desires. Were we not ready to accept the terrible possibility of ultimately turning our hearts into stone, we could never be free in a radical sense—a bit in the same way as our relationship to truth could never be, in a radical or full sense *ours*, if we were not ready to

accept that there is no method to secure a good will and hence an undistorted relation to truth. Similarly, if we wouldn't be ready to accept that love and care between individuals cannot be secured or determined, especially not by the other party alone, then we *as ourselves* could never really love or care for the other *as themselves*, and *vice versa*.

What I am trying to say here, then, is that to understand the prison of retribution as the purgatory where the unjust souls cannot hide from—behind their 'bodies'—the way in which they, in their essence, will the good—the way in which they care for and are addressed by others—deepens and even clarifies, at least in some sense, the weight and seriousness of the interlinkages between reason, the will, and the good.<sup>81</sup>

### Summary

It must be emphasised once more that the whole of this chapter is to be read as my attempt to trace what kind of sense can be made of—what sense I can make of—the way in which the mind's or soul's relationship to 'body' is portrayed in *Gorgias* and, moreover, the way in which this relationship and its inner tension interlinks with the existential-moral-epistemological concerns about the corruption of the soul and its relationship to the issue of meaning. What is, I have asked, the concern that Plato is grappling with (in *Gorgias*)? In trying to map out or trace the sense or meaning of this concern, I might have gone beyond (or beside) what Plato himself would have agreed to say. Many of the things I have derived or distilled out of Plato's texts are not to be found there explicitly, at least not in any obvious way. Moreover, as I have tried to make clear, part of

81 However, understanding *Gorgias* in this light need not shake off the shadow of resentment that arguably lies over Plato's cosmos. Perhaps it might be somewhat ambiguously said—although it is not really my aim to try to make any decisive arguments or final judgements about Plato—that the double sidedness of *Gorgias* is expressive of a dissonance, a split, in Plato's own soul. Perhaps the resentment in Plato works alongside or parallel with something of the sort I have been suggesting in this subsection; that *Gorgias* shows us how Plato's own soul is split between a longing for, on the one hand, a soul stripped of its impotence (the body) enabling the fulfilment of his desire for social power and pleasure—which answers to his fear of the openness of love and care—and, on the other hand, a longing to be freed of the corruption (the fear) that veils him from the true desire of his soul (*in his relationship with others*); a longing to be free of the social gaze and thus “naked” and immediate before the other, who him/herself is also “naked”, free of the desire for social appearance/identity and thus free to see Plato's (naked) soul. Or, as pointed out, one might read the shadow of resentment hanging over Plato's thinking as a tension he, Plato, wanted to make explicit and work with, and thought that it would be good for others to also think about it and work their way through it.

the tracing has involved attributing a kind of split or tension to Plato himself, a split between, on the one hand, what I would call genuine insight, clarity, and acknowledgement and, on the other hand, a sort of bitterness and resentment. That is to say, it might be that these motivational forces mix together in an undifferentiated manner in Plato's writing. Nevertheless, what makes Plato interesting is that he in fact acknowledges some of these main tensions and in *Gorgias*, through Socrates' interlocutors, directs potential accusations and doubts about his own ideas towards himself. Whether or not this acknowledgement and Plato's treatment of it actually manages to free his thought from the accusations is something I leave open. I remain hesitant, but I have attempted to show how one might read Plato so that at least central aspects of the accusations are overcome. And in the next chapter I will go even further in my 'positive' interpretation of Plato.

Having said this, I think it is proper to end this chapter by trying to bring together the central themes and ideas that we have been working with. We begin with what has been said about, what I have called the grammatical ties between reason, the good, and the will. Perhaps the best place to start is with my suggestion that the will is internal to, or belongs to, what I called, the 'discourse of reason'. What I have attempted to capture with this is that the will, its meaning, is something that can be understood only as revealed by, and answering to, the use of reason. Or better yet, to will *is* to harbour implicit and/or explicit claims about the good, to profess to have 'good' reasons for why one wants, or thinks one wants, this or that. The examination of the will is thus pursued, Plato (I think, rightly) observes, by looking for whether or not one can in fact justify, if one can give sound reasons, for what one claims to want, to mean. Failure to give (or resistance to giving) good reasons grammatically reveals that one is not in fact doing what one wants, but only what one see fit to do. So in being asked to give reasons for, to justify, one's beliefs and actions, one is asked to take responsibility for them; to place oneself fully and undivided in what one says and does. Or; one is asked to tie one's soul to one's words and deeds. It is this tie, so I think Plato would say, that is the (ultimate) meaning of words, or what (ultimately) reveals the meaning of words. Fail in making this tie, and you fail, ultimately, in making sense—you reveal a split or dissonance in your soul between what you consciously 'think' you want and how your (repressed) real will-desire unconsciously manifests.

Plato, I think, thus seems to be suggesting that language, words, concepts, inevitably have a rational and moral order. That is, what I have suggested is that the truth of the soul('s will-desire) inevitably comes to expression in the grammar of one's utterances, be it consciously or unconsciously. In this sense, the order internal to the uses of language—grammar—is to be understood in a somewhat different sense than the Wittgenstein-inspired notion of 'the rules of language' as standardly conceived and advocated by for instance Peter Hacker

(Hacker 1986; Bennett & Hacker 2003). For my suggestion is that the Platonic order or grammar of language is to be understood exactly as bound to the tie with which one is able to join one's soul to words, and not, as it were, that there is 'language' there in the (social)world, somehow given to or predetermined for us, to which we then must attune our souls in order to make sense.<sup>82</sup> In the end, meaning answers to the good and the good is the very essence of the soul, the essence of its will-desire. In short, there is a sense in which I think that Plato would say that meaning finds its home, its *sense*, in and through the soul, and not from something 'external' to the soul, say, society or history. Nevertheless, as I will continue to argue in the following chapter, the soul is not, for Plato, a 'private soul', at least not in the sense that contemporary naturalist seem to think of it, nor is it something that is in any absolute sense separate from history, from society.

This then brings us to the question of what the good and, consequently, the rational *in the soul* ultimately answers to. We are of course used to attributing the following claim to Plato: the good in the soul that reason cannot but vouch for is the *idea* of the good, which is found in the transcendental realm of ideas. Now I do not want to deny that Plato makes such claims, although I cannot really understand what he could mean by this—nor do I think he can either, but that is another matter. Nevertheless, I think that we can also identify another kind of idea, perhaps only implicitly—unconsciously—dwelling in Plato's texts, especially *Gorgias*. But locating this other sense or idea requires a somewhat more indirect approach. For what I have attempted to do is to trace the meaning of the good through tracing what Plato portrays as the essential—moral-existential-epistemic—distorting force dwelling in the interlocutors' souls. Put differently, when locating this essential force of distortion or displacement, I have, in a sense, tried to reconstruct some notion of the 'healthy' soul, that is to say, reconstruct what it would mean for the expression of the soul and its will-desire not to be displaced. In doing so, I suggest, we do not need the 'realm of ideas'. Or, alternatively, understanding it along the lines I have suggested qualifies what could be meant by the 'realm of ideas' and a life outside of the cave.—Again, I will have more to say about this issue in the following chapter.

How then have I traced the distortion of the good, reason, and meaning? I began by identifying both the appetites and the body as somehow connected with unreason and the failure to pursue purpose, meaning, the good. Here the central issue revolved around Plato's claim that the appetites move uncontrollably "back and forth" and cannot thus themselves pursue the good. It is only reason that can know what is the good and hence be directed towards it, consequently resulting in Plato's famous prescriptive and normative claim that the appetites must be

<sup>82</sup> I will develop these issues further in the following chapter

under the rule or discipline of reason. Or more precisely; only as long as one does not come in conflict with reason, only as long as one does not resist or produce false/unsound justifications, can one be said to be good, rational. The body entered this tension between reason and unreason, between the will and doing what one sees fit, by being identified, by Plato, as that with which the soul expresses itself; the sign of the soul. In conjunction with this, Plato identified the body as a tomb in which the soul is imprisoned. The rationale of this latter identification of the body with a tomb was, I suggested, that insofar as the soul is divided, dissonant, and thus fails to pursue the good, that is, fails to make sense, the soul's expressions become or remain empty (senseless) like a tomb and, consequently, the soul is or remains imprisoned in this tomb: the will-desire of the soul fails to 'travel' with its expression.

A soul *ruled* by the appetites cannot but fail in its willing. Yet, *that* a soul is ruled by the appetites (the 'real cause' of it) cannot be—I suggested Plato holds in kin with Augustine, Bacon, and Descartes—rooted in the division of the soul into a rational and an irrational part, nor in each of these independently. For the central question here is *what* it is that has *caused* the soul to be ruled by the irrational part, as the problem is exactly in the ruling and not with appetites as such; appetites are quite welcomed in a “healthy” soul, as they are enjoyed ‘rationally’, in light of the good, meaningfully. Now the central claim I have tried to advance is that in *Gorgias*, and even in the allegory of the cave, we find that the rule of the appetites is in fact subordinate to a desire for social affirmation, to a “love for the people”. It is, in other words, this “love for the people” that is the central, the essential, force of unreason and the corruption of the soul *of the interlocutors* (and the prisoners of the cave). In *Gorgias*, the “love for the people” is qualified or identified even more precisely, as Socrates’ interlocutors reveal by and by. Namely, what underpins their motivational drive for social affirmation is their desire to attempt to secure themselves against the infliction of unjust acts and thus against humiliation and the loss of social affirmation. In other words, as I argued, the core displacement is internal to the struggle for social affirmation and *not* to a struggle to secure oneself against a ‘general vulnerability’ inherent in our finite and mortal nature. Moreover, my claim has been that underpinning this desire for social affirmation is the desire to *secure* the other's desire—for one's own desire; to *secure* the desire to be loved and care for *by* the other, *in* one's love and care *for* the other. Or, put differently, my suggestion has been that the truth of desire is to be desired by the other, not as an *object* but as *someone* who *desires* (the other's desire for one's desire).

Now then, the “love for the people”, the urge to *secure* the love and care of the other, is a displacement of desire/love exactly in that it becomes, so to speak, 'object-orientated'. For attempting to *secure* the care and love of the other means that one must give up on desire and instead try to establish oneself as the

irresistible *object* of the other's desire. Attempting to *make* the other, necessarily, desire oneself (as an *object* with affirmable properties) is to give up on oneself as *oneself* and the other as *themselves*. And, it is in this context and in accordance with this dynamics that the 'body' enters the picture: 'body' is the *object* of the social gaze, the means to social affirmation and the displaced securing of the other's desire. This is why, as long as one is "dressed" in or with one's 'body', the truth of the soul cannot be seen and, consequently, why the body is a tomb; an empty or dead sign failing to express the reality of the will, failing to make sense, failing to pursue the good.

Again, the Platonic soul is not 'private' in the contemporary naturalist sense. Rather the good, the soul and, consequently, meaning, is essentially tied to the other person. For in addition to my suggestion that the urge for securing the love and care of the other essentially interlinks the truth of soul to the other's desire, I proposed that the same essential tie between the self, the other, and truth and goodness is vividly reflected in the halls of the final judgement in Hades. Not only must the one who is to be judged be "naked", that is, separated from the 'body', from the object of the social gaze, but so must the judge. That is to say, in order for true meaning, for true rationality, for true goodness, to prevail, both the judge and the judged must be stripped of their 'bodies' and they must be isolated from all kinsmen, from the social gaze. What is left here then is two individuals, facing each other *as themselves*, and not as objects of social positioning, but as an 'I' for a 'you'.

Yet, strangely enough, the ultimate relationship to truth, the other, and the good, is articulated in terms of *authority*; a *judge* and a *judged*. Why, one might ask? For is there not something conflicting between the way Plato portrays the relationship between the two individuals nakedly facing each other in Hades and the language of authority that, nevertheless, characterises this relationship? On the one hand, these individuals are supposed to be equally susceptible to the lures of 'the body' and equally in need of 'purification', and yet, on the other hand, Plato attributes to the other a status of authority? Why is it that the ultimate encounter with the justice, with the good, is portrayed as one between a 'judge' and 'judged'; in terms of law, which is, arguably, a concept belonging to, or under the command of, the social gaze? I suggested that there might be two different and somewhat conflicting answers to these considerations, which in turn perhaps reflects Plato's own internal split. Or, alternatively, reflect Plato's ironical and dialogical 'style'—a reading more in tune with the one I have been advocating for and will continue to do so in the following chapter. On the one hand, then, the figuring of authority lends itself all too easily, as we saw, to a reading of Plato and the eschatological tale in which the notion of reason and goodness/justice is formed by ressentiment and rooted in 'impotence'. This is of course not a new reading on my part, as this whole dimension is suggested by Plato himself and even more elaborately by Nietzsche. So I will not repeat it here.

Rather, I think that we in fact have reason to place more weight on reading the issue of authority as a kind of *ironical and dialogical*<sup>83</sup> way of characterising the sense in which doing what is unjust is going against the constitution of oneself, and thus inflicting pain and suffering on oneself; the judge and authority is ultimately the nakedness of one's own desire for the other's desire. Put differently, the authority of the other is here to be understood more in terms of bad conscience. In acting unjustly one can bring harm only to the other's 'body', whereas one, because one constitutively cares for the other, in fact harms one's *own* soul. More precisely, the authority aspect emerges—with its ironical twist—because correcting an ill in one's soul demands facing the evil done and because this evil is exactly done to the other (whose desire one desires), the other (or in a transmuted form the Other—as in the judge) becomes the authority of one's conscience.<sup>84</sup> Put differently, because evil or injustice is done to the other, in acknowledging this evil, in 'correcting' one's soul, one must suffer the suffering of the other that has imprinted itself in one's soul. This is at least the way in which I would trace the sense of the "prison of payment retribution".

And so we come back to the issue of reason and its relationship to the "final thing to be seen", namely the good. My claim has been that we can trace a claim or suggestion in Plato's writings that one cannot want to inflict pain and suffering *as such* on others because this goes against the core of one's soul. But if this is true, then this means that having 'good' reasons, providing rational justifications, is always necessary when one does in fact inflict pain and suffering. That is to say, because we cannot but truly *want* the good, reasons or justifications are called for whenever we do in fact inflict pain and suffering on others because we must always have ('good') reasons for our souls to morally-existentially bear or manage this infliction. This has, as I would like to claim, both a positive and a negative side to it—if this is the proper way of putting it. First, correcting an ill, whether an injury to the body or an ill or corruption in the soul, sometimes demands some form of pain and suffering, even to the extent that it can cause terror both in us and in those whose souls need 'correction'. Here the 'correcting of an ill', wanting to care for the other, is of course—to the extent it in fact is—our *reason* for our actions, and simultaneously what makes it possible for us to actually inflict pain and suffering on the other—because the reasons *are* our caring. Conversely, if we could *not* provide sound justifications, if

83 The irony here is, I would suggest, that Plato uses exactly those elements, that is, 'the social gaze', 'law', 'discipline' etc., which Callicles and Polus profess to aspire to transcend but in the end are shown to be fully conditioned by, in order to characterise a truth about their souls, a truth that does not essentially pertain to the concepts of 'law', 'discipline' etc. themselves.

84 I will return to this topic in the following chapter and try to give a more detailed account of what is involved in the transmutation of bad conscience and evil to the dynamics/dialectics of authority and law.

we would *not* have good reasons to which we could wholeheartedly tie our souls, we would and could not, to the extent we were doing what we *wanted*—that is, cared for the other—inflict the pain and suffering. However, to the extent that we do care, to the extent that we are good, there is no tension between our reasons and our will-desire, in that insofar as we do care we do not attempt to provide justifications for what we do not want, that is, for our evil; the provision of false justifications is expressive of our displacement. So, on the other hand again, whenever we only do what we see fit to do, whenever we act unjustly and deliberately cause pain and suffering (as such) to others, we will always put forth justifications—‘in bad faith’—in order to make the evil we do bearable to our souls. Put differently, in such cases putting forth justifications for our actions is a way of displacing the way our mistreatment of others goes against our own souls. And importantly, it is internal to the *meaning* of making evil morally-existentially bearable to ourselves that we direct our justifications towards others as well. That is, we attempt to present ourselves in a favourable and justified light—as someone *deserving* to be affirmed, although the social gaze might *de facto* turn its back on us—as we desire the affirmation from others because, fundamentally, we feel addressed by them, and thus also responsible for them.

Now then, given the persistent moral-existential necessity of reason in our lives, how are we to discern when our justifications are sound—good and rational—and when they are distorted, when they are forms of displacement?<sup>85</sup> My suggestion is, and I take it that Plato would more or less agree here, that it is in fact *only* a good will, the good—the ultimate of all things—that guarantees the ‘rationality’ or ‘truth’ of reason. In this sense, while Plato does claim that ‘true’ rationality is always good because it is only the good that makes reason properly rational, this does not mean that being good *is* rational. That is, we cannot understand the good as a ‘rational principle’. Rather, when and only when one is good can one be soundly rational. There is no way in which rationality, truth, can be guaranteed with the help of a method, or with the help of checking for consistency, despite Bacon’s and Descartes’—and a host of other philosophers’—phantasmatic dreams. It is only when one separates truth from the *meaning* of truth, and rather connects it with, say, ‘effective’ power over phenomena (as in the case of Bacon and Descartes) that ‘truth’ can be inscribed in a method—that is, only when we have assumed the ‘rationality’ of the method *without* any rationally justified method. Or, it is only when reason is conceived of

<sup>85</sup> As might of course be noted here, this is the same problematic as identified in the *Prologue* concerning ‘moral philosophy’ (as portrayed by James Rachels). That is, as I hope the reader will have noticed, one thing I have wanted to indicate, more or less implicitly, is that the problem of moral philosophy is intertwined, essentially, with the so-called mind-body problem.



in purely 'formal' terms, that is, when it is stripped of *meaning*, that one can discern consistency and soundness simply in terms of formal-symbolic systems. For, I argue, there is no *method* for how to become good. It is only goodness that generates goodness. The dream of reason legitimating its own truth or consistency is, arguably, a dangerous notion, as so many cases in history has shown. Likewise, it is quite a dangerous idea to think that goodness, the good (itself), can be inscribed in rules or norms—as a *given*—as it is *our* goodness, our will and courage to be good, that must in the end constitute, give sense to, the good.

## V

### *The Real of the Soul*

#### Introduction

In chapter II I suggested that the naturalist mind-body problem contained two entangled, yet hidden or concealed concerns, which I attempted to rewrite as, on the one hand, a concern with the tension between the inner and its expression in the relationship with and to the other and, on the other hand, as a concern with the mind's relationship to 'truth'. While the latter of these rewritings was the explicit subject of our discussion in chapter III on Bacon and Descartes (and Augustine), I think that the preceding chapter on Plato illustrated how the concern with the mind's relationship to truth, that is, the mind-body strife as a problem of the will, is essentially entangled with the concern with the inner and its expression. In this fifth and final chapter, I will try to take this discussion further and to illustrate in new ways how the concern with the mind-body relationship or strife is conjoined with the question of meaning, and meaning with desire.

In the first subsection, my goal is to make more explicit why and how I propose that the *meaning* of desire and the nakedness or openness between souls ought to be understood as internal to philosophy itself. In fact, there is a sense in which philosophy is, I suggest Plato suggests, part and parcel of the very meaning of openness. That is, Socratic philosophy in some fundamental sense reflects or answers to the very *Ur*-scene of both meaning and desire. My argument here centrally builds on my account of why the *meaning* of the ideal of reason and the good in the eschatological tale is only to be found in the dialogical-discursive examination conducted by Socrates and his interlocutors, and *not* in the tale as such.

In the second subsection I turn, once more, to Augustine and Descartes in order to try to articulate the decisive difference I suggest is to be found in their respective approaches to the concerns manifest in the mind-body strife, compared to that of Plato. My proposal will be that the quintessential distortion or displacement of the Augustinian-Cartesian project can be captured in the way both of them suggest that the 'remedy' to, the proper action against, the mind-body strife is to be achieved by the mind "turning on itself", and that this "turn" displaces an essential trait of the picture of meaning that their metaphysics in

fact hinges on, namely that the *Ur*-scene of meaning essentially includes and presupposes an understanding, and desire, *between individuals*.

The third subsection continues to explore my proposal that the *Ur*-scene of meaning, and desire, lies in the 'nakedness' between individuals. I will support the arguments and illustrations developed in my reading of *Gorgias*, and my proposal that Plato's conception of philosophy is in fact a turning towards this *Ur*-scene, by drawing on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

Following the suggestions articulated in the preceding subsection, in the fourth subsection I critically engage with Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity, which I introduce as one that partly supports or is in line with things I have been saying, while simultaneously suggesting a different logic to the dynamics of the inner-outer split than the one argued for throughout this thesis. However, as the reader will notice, articulating and pinpointing clearly what this difference amounts to is a difficult task, partly because the difference is in the end, I believe, very minimal and, partly, because this minimal difference is nonetheless decisive.

Having, nevertheless, come with some suggestions about how the perspective I have been developing can help us overcome the deadlocks I claim to be internal to Lacan's theory, I move on, in the last subsection, to give short and rough characterisations, by way of (imagined) examples, of the ways in which one might go about identifying the logic and dynamics involved in the displacement of desire.

### **Plato and the Nakedness of the Soul**

As argued for in the preceding chapter, in Plato we find articulated the basic notion that the mind-body strife or the tension between reason and unreason, is a problem of the will. That is, the distance between the soul and (its) 'truth' is directly proportional to the extent that the soul has displaced its own will-desire and, consequently, divided itself between what it consciously considers to be fit to do and what, unconsciously concealed in the grammar of its expression, it really wants. Moreover, this gap between the will and doing what one sees fit is manifested, in the practice of discursive reason, as a failure to make sense of what one says or means, exactly because one is unable to bind one's soul, undivided, to what one says, believes, does; to how one lives. In short, one fails to express the soul's will, fails to give meaning to what one says. Consequently, the sign-body with which the soul expresses itself becomes or remains dead or empty; a tomb in which the soul is imprisoned; the will of the soul, the real of the soul, does not travel with its expression. Hence, the real, undivided, will-desire of the soul is to have unity between the inner and expression. Or, in fact more precisely put, the

undivided will-desire of the soul is *not* to be divided—as the claim is not that the real of desire is a desire for any particular kind of ‘unity’, but rather that it is internal to the grammar of (the real of) desire that one does *not* want to be divided. The nakedness (non-division) of the soul is not, so to speak, a unity of two components in conflict with each other *in* one’s symptom; although the *symptomatic* cry might be to unite or reconcile that which stands in conflict.

The question we will begin with now is how to read Plato’s allusion to the eschatological tale, how to understand the notion that the soul can be “naked”, and the good be transparent, *only* in the afterlife. For if we read *Gorgias* non-ironically and non-dialogically, then Plato seems to be claiming that a kind of *necessary* obstacle pertains to secular life, and that the soul can be nakedly expressed only in the hereafter. More precisely, at least if we follow my suggestion of how to identify the force of unreason and the meaning of ‘body’ in *Gorgias*, and if we read Plato non-ironically and non-dialogically, Plato seems to be suggesting that the soul is, in its secular existence, always and *necessarily* veiled by the desire for the social gaze, that is, veiled by a *necessary* displacement of desire. For as I argued, and as I read the *Gorgias*, the *Ur*-scene of the corruption of the soul is when the individual kills off the openness of desire for the other(’s desire) (because the very nature of this openness and desire does not ‘include’ any guarantee) and replaces, or rather displaces the desire for the other(’s desire) as desire for (social) affirmation, which, in turn, grammatically ‘guarantees’ a form of security through the very position of the (’socially determined’) identity one struggles to gain and assume. The result of this displacement of desire is then the emergence of a scene or masquerade where the individual becomes determined by social norms and customs, although perhaps aspiring to be ‘unique’ and ‘above’ the herd—as was the case with Polus and Callicles. Or; the role that the social gaze has *is* the reason for it itself: the social gaze is, a kind of mutual, unspoken, agreement or covenant between individuals so as to mask and protect each of them against the vulnerability of, pace Hobbes (1998), the naked openness of ‘the real of desire’. Conversely, a “healthy” soul is one that has ‘left the cave’, one that has released the cramp-like displacement of desire (the chains and shackles of the prisoners), and dared to live in the naked openness (and ‘vulnerability’) of desire—dared to live openly in one’s desire for the other’s desire without any (phantasmatic) ‘guarantee’ that desire is reciprocal.

Our question, then, is how such displacement could be a *necessary* trait of ‘secular’ existence. Much hangs on whether or not we understand not only Plato’s notion, but any notion of a ‘healthy’, undivided, or naked soul and its expression, as being possible only in the hereafter, and somehow *impossible* for us here and now. What stands to be gained or lost here in this question is, I believe, the very *meaning* of the soul(’s desire). For, as I will argue, if we picture the real of the soul as immediately and directly expressible only in the hereafter, then we

are nevertheless claiming that the moral-existential difficulty that constitutes the imprisonment of the soul by the body-sign is for us, here and now, a structural imprisonment—that is, *not* a moral-existential imprisonment. And if this is so, then I believe that any notion we might have of the naked, undivided, soul (in the hereafter, in the ‘beyond’), is but a phantasmatic construction. To refer back to the discussion on Descartes and Augustine in chapter III, to think of the soul's division and inner conflict as *given* is to understand it exclusively in and through the *symptom*, whereas what we are searching for is an understanding of (the meaning of) our a-temporal participation in the (Original) *act* of sin/displacement; we are searching for the *cause* in ourselves.<sup>86 87</sup>

My reading of *Gorgias* seems to me, however, to supply strong reasons to think that Plato might not at all have been fixed on situating the possibility of naked expression of the soul and its will-desire *between individuals*, literally, to the hereafter. Or, I want to suggest how we might read *Gorgias* as in principle open to such a conception. Two explicit references are made in *Gorgias* to the notion that the nakedness of the soul is only possible in the hereafter. The first one is somewhat vague: Socrates responds to Callicles' suggestion that if self-discipline, rather than the constant pursuit of pleasure, was a virtue then “stones and corpses would be the happiest” (492 e) by saying “[p]erhaps in reality we’re dead” (493 a), perhaps “being dead is being alive” (492 e). It is central, I would

86 We might ask: if we understand the *Ur-scene* of the corruption of the soul as a moral-existential difficulty, as a displacement of desire, then it seems to be incomprehensible that there could be a necessary or structural impossibility informing this difficulty since it is rooted in the life between humans. What is it that the hereafter could provide us with that is not available for us here and now? Courage? Independence? Love? But in what sense could such things be ‘given’ by or in the hereafter? How could *I*, my soul, sustain itself if I suddenly were ‘made’ so courageous—my love ‘made’ so strong—or were ‘made’ so independent in relation to the social gaze and the other whom I stand before, that I—or rather, in this case, ‘it’—did not displace my desire? How could I still be *me*, and you *you*, in the hereafter, if what such courage, independence, love, which is needed for the nakedness of the soul, structurally and necessarily was inconceivable and impossible to us now? That is, in what sense would the courage and independence demanded for the nakedness of the soul be *mine*, if it came to me automatically, after my soul had departed from my ‘actual’ body?

87 Moreover, I am here also reminded of something Wittgenstein wrote in the *Tractatus*: “The temporal immortality of the human soul, that is to say, its eternal survival after death, is not only in no way guaranteed, but this assumption in the first place will not do for us what we always tried to make it do. Is a riddle solved by the fact that I survive forever? Is this eternal life not as enigmatic as our present one? The solution to the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time. (It is not the problems of natural science which have to be solved.)” (Wittgenstein 1933, § 6.4312, pp. 185e-187e) I am not that happy with Wittgenstein's notion that the solution to the riddle of life is to be found outside of space and time, although it makes certain sense (to me) read against the backdrop of the *Tractarian* view about the world of space and time, expressed in the last, bracketed, sentence of the remark.

hold, to keep in mind that the reference made to the idea that real life begins only when we are dead, ought to be understood exactly as a dialogical and ironic response to, or reversal of, Callicles' claims about the purpose/essence of life, the soul, desire. For we must remember that the dialogue suggests that it is in fact Callicles, through his displacement of desire, who kills off the reality of life, the soul's will-desire. That is, it is in fact Socrates' interlocutors who advocate anti-life, not Plato. In light of this, it seems hard to take Socrates' references to death in a literal sense. Rather, Socrates' ironic reversal of Callicles' claims might be paraphrased in the following way: 'if *this* is what you claim life/desire is, *then* real life/desire must be in death, that is, when *your* life/desire (which is anti-life/desire) is dead'. Moreover, to understand the response in this sense is also to understand it as a *dialogical* response, or rather a re-presentation of a dialogical engagement.<sup>88</sup> That is, the response Socrates gives ought to be understood *as a response to Callicles*, to (the dissonance in) *his* soul, not as a declaration of an eternal or universal truth. Or, perhaps rather, the eternal or universal truth of this response must be understood exactly through its ironical and dialogical nature.<sup>89</sup>

The second explicit reference to the hereafter is of course to be found in the eschatological tale. Here the claim is that the soul can be naked only after it has departed from the body, when the human being has died and enters the courts of Hades. However, although Socrates declares that he is "convinced by these

88 I want to mention here that, given my interpretation of Plato, the difference between Socrates and Plato with respect to the importance of the other person and the dialogical nature of the search for meaning could be articulated as follows. While Socrates only engaged in oral dialogical examinations of concepts and souls (no real difference can be made here), Plato *wrote*, mostly in dialogical form, reflecting, re-presenting, the oral and dialogical practice of Socratic philosophy and its search for meaning. At the same time, we know that Plato was concerned with the dangers of the written word (Plato 1997g) and, as Thomas Szlezák (1999) and other representatives of what has been called the Tübingen School (Nikulin 2012) argues, placed real (oral) communication above the written word. To some extent following Szlezák's interpretation that the written word could never "adequately preform the task of the oral logos" (Ibid., p. 34), my reading of *Gorgias* would understand this as a feature of Plato's notion (as I have presented it) that meaning and truth is something that can become alive only *in-between* ('naked') individuals; when one is able to tie one's soul, undivided, to what is expressed to another. Written texts can only, as it were, re-present philosophy, the 'living word'. And herein lies the danger, for this means that written philosophy is but an image of the real, and if the written practice of philosophy becomes the dominant practice, then the image is mistaken for the real, like the shadows in the cave. Meaning, and will-desire, is something that is, has its home, in-between individuals.

89 Remember here once more Socrates' announcement: "So please don't tell me to call for a vote from the people present here [...] For I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I'm saying, and that's the man I'm having a discussion with. The majority I disregard" (*Gorgias*, 474 a).

accounts" (526d), and that he tells the tale "as true", I suggest that this must be understood *not* as something transcending the (re-presented) dialogical (rational-discursive) exchange between Socrates and his interlocutors, but rather as forming a continuation of/with it. Or, put differently, it ought to be understood as mirroring the dialogical exchange.

What does it mean for a tale or story to be true, especially a tale about the gods and a higher order? Is the truth of such a tale akin to the truth of the word of the oracle at Delphi, that is, the 'truth' that there is no one wiser than Socrates (*Apology*, 21a)? —Does one need to decipher the meaning of this truth or does one take it literally? And, what would it *mean* to take it literally? My suggestion is this: the eschatological tale ought to be understood more or less as the words of an oracle. That is, the truth of the tale lies in the discursive examination of the subject of the tale.<sup>90</sup> However, in contrast to the oracle's reply to Caerephon and Socrates' search for its meaning, in the case of *Gorgias* the tale or the voice of the god comes last, not first. In other words, the *sense* or *meaning* of the tale's claim that the good, that the truth of the soul, is revealed only through the study of a naked soul by another naked soul, *is to be found in the Socratic examination and its ideals*; just as the *meaning* of the reply given to Caerephon by the Oracle "there is no-one wiser than Socrates" (*Apology*, 21a) is to be found in Socrates' examination of those he thought to be wiser than he was, but who turned out not to be so *because of reasons explicated in the dialogues*. As Socrates notes:

Maybe you think this account is told as an old wives' tale, and you feel contempt for it. And it certainly wouldn't be a surprising thing to feel contempt for it *if we could look for and somehow find one better and truer than it*. As it is, you see that there are three of you, the wisest of the Greeks of today—you, Polus, and Gorgias—and you're not able to prove that there is any other life one should live than the one which will clearly turn out to be advantageous in that world, too. (*Gorgias*, 527 a-b, emphasis added)

What is it that makes the tale the best and truest alternative? Well, what else could it be than that it mirrors exactly those things, those *meanings*, which have emerged during the dialogical exchange? So; it is the sense that is made or found in the dialogical examination that reveals the sense of the tale, and not *vice versa*—the whole point here is that as long as the otherworldly is not 'grounded' in the life of the living souls, the *meaning* of the otherworldly remains unclear, *as*

90 Is the reply of the oracle at Delphi "There is no-one wiser than Socrates" to Caerephon's inquiry "Is there anyone wiser than Socrates?" (*Apology* 21 a) to be read as a prophesy? That is, is it only by receiving these words from the oracle, by searching, through discursive reason, for the *meaning* of the reply that Socrates becomes wise?

*meaning is, ultimately, what one ties one's soul to, undivided* (cf. chapter IV above). The courts of Hades, and the ultimate judgement that is delivered there, is then to be read, I suggest, as the grammatical re-presentations<sup>91</sup> of the same truth that prevails here on earth.

But what, then, about the 'ultimate' character of this re-presentation? That is, how are we to understand the suggestion that the tale makes about the inevitable or unavoidable nakedness of the soul in the courts of Hades? Does not the tale with its ultimate judgement suggest to us a magical phantasm, that is, a picture of a total annihilation of the presence and possibility of the social gaze ('body')? The magical phantasm here is obviously due to the difficulty of understanding what could establish such a condition; the absence of the 'actual' body—that is, of what we nowadays think we mean by 'body'—seems certainly not to be able to do it, since as long as we are souls that can express ourselves to each other, the social gaze and the measuring of oneself in relation to this gaze remains at least a possibility. But again, what we need to do here is to search for this meaning of the tale in the 'secular'. That is, we need to ask ourselves, where and when are we, our souls, in a "naked" state here in our actual, 'earthly' lives.

Think once more of the queer, anarchical, feature of the ultimate judgement in Hades: although the court comprises a judge and a judged, the judge—in *some way* representing the 'ultimate' voice of reason, the good—does not him- or herself possesses any (higher) authority over the judged. In what sense? Well, the judge must him-/herself also be deprived of the 'body', of the screen in front of his/her eyes that deflects and displaces the truth of the will-desire and reason. In other words, in order to be able to truly represent the voice of reason, the good, the judge must also somehow become naked. But, it is exactly to this question of how to become "naked" that we do not find any answer, other than the magical separation after death. That is, the figure of the judge does not in any way clarify what it *means* for the soul to be or become naked, and for goodness and truth to prevail. We have, then, two features in the picture of the ultimate judgement essentially entangled with each other. On the one hand, we have the study or examination of the soul by the judge. On the other hand, we have the naked openness between the souls of the judge and the judged. That is, the nakedness between souls is somehow part and parcel of the judgement, the study or examination, itself. What is this tie, this entanglement? As noted, to find the *meaning* or *sense* of the tale we need to turn, not to the tale, but rather to the dialogical exchange, the Socratic examination of the soul.

Throughout the discussion with Callicles, and already beginning with the exchanged with Polus, Socrates links the rational and the good soul to a "disciplined", "lawful", soul. Why must the soul be disciplined? Because the

91 See footnote 88 above.



irrational part of the soul tends to rule over the rational part; because one has displaced one's desire and risks doing what one sees fit rather than what one (really) wants. That is, the soul ought to be disciplined by reason, by the rational part of the soul; ultimately, by the good. How then is it that Socrates, as the person who has no rivals in wisdom, constitutively 'disciplines' his soul? That is, how is it that Socrates attempts to live a rational-good life? By controlling his appetites? By withdrawing into a monastery and leading an ascetic life? Perhaps Socrates is attentive not to overindulge in neither food, drinks, nor sex. However, this cannot be the constitutive call of reason, the good. That is, the idea of the disciplining of the natural appetites gains its meaning only in relation to the extent that appetites are *in strife* with reason, with the will, with the good. So, in order for 'rational discipline' to get a foothold (i.e. sense), one must first, already, understand the *meaning* of rational, and, ultimately, of the good. That is, one must first be able to tie one's soul, undivided, to the 'use' of the concept of reason before one can be said to be able to rationally discipline one's soul. Consequently, what we first of all need, what our primary 'discipliner' ought to be, is the search for meaning, namely *philosophy*. So, in 'disciplining' his soul, Plato (or the figure of Socrates) does not, grammatically put, cannot place his primary focus on disciplining his appetites. Rather, everything hinges on the *turn to philosophy, to the examination of souls*. Hence my proposal: the 'discipline' of the soul, the rational and good life, is, for Plato, essentially tied to the practice of philosophy.<sup>92</sup> Philosophy *is* the 'discipline' of the soul, which Plato is calling for—*philosophy is the non-ironical truth of 'self-discipline' in his ironical response to the interlocutors*. Any other rational discipline, its *meaning*, must answer to philosophy, to the search for tying one's soul, undivided, to what one says and does.

But again, what is the relationship between the examining life and the nakedness of the soul? It is, I propose, this: the rational-good soul searches—*openly, nakedly*—for meaning. Not a *solitary* search; Socrates does not withdraw from the "bustle of (social) life" to a stove heated room, as did Descartes. Rather, the rational, disciplined life, the search for and cultivation of understanding, *is* the examination of the self through an examination of the other. Or rather, its *deal* is an examination of self and other in the naked openness between self and other. Or; a truthful examination of the soul, the search for meaning, needs the nakedness between souls, just as in the ultimate judgement in the courts of Hades; 'as in heaven so on earth'—or; 'as on earth so in heaven'. The relation between the examination of souls—the search for meaning—and the naked openness between souls ought, then, to be understood as one of unity. That is, I think that Plato's claim is—or at least I think one can trace this claim in the

<sup>92</sup> As Socrates claims in the *Apology*, the "unexamined life is not worth living" (*Apology*, 38a).

grammar of his writings—that the examination of souls is itself a nakedness of the soul, a nakedness *between* souls. This does not, however, mean, as far as I can see, that whenever we do not ‘examine’ each other we are not naked, cannot be naked. Rather, the point is that to imagine a nakedness between individuals, is also to imagine, as an integral and essential part, a willingness for the open, ongoing, search for what we mean and who we are.

Picture yourself together with your friend in an open and loving spirit (and whatever you imagine here will obviously be material for examination). At some point, your friend says or expresses something that is *unclear* to you. Perhaps she expresses a new feature of herself, as yet unknown to you and perhaps to your friend as well. Perhaps the two of you react to or understand some event you witness in ‘the world’ differently. Be that as it may, the point I am driving at here is that even if we think of two souls openly or nakedly together, that is, even if we think of two people that do not conceal their ‘inner’ or displace their desire, this image of openness or nakedness cannot sustain itself without simultaneously containing a continuous (openness or willingness to the) examination of self and other; a *search* for meaning. Put differently, to imagine a naked openness between individuals that does not include as an essential feature the search for meaning, is to imagine the other, and oneself—one’s relationship with the other—as static, as finalised, as dead; as an image. Openness between individuals essentially includes being open to all that a soul can be(come)—and I mean ‘can’ here not in terms of all things imaginable (including all the destructive things) but rather all things to which one can, undivided, tie one’s soul; all the things that *mean* something. Consequently, each time some unclarity arises between individuals, for whatever reason, to search for the meaning of it (of self and other) *is* to be open to and with the other in one’s undivided desire. Again, the question of meaning keeps announcing itself anew, indefinitely.<sup>93</sup>

To repeat, my point here is that even when there are no particular restraints, concealments, or displacements involved, even when people do meet each other openly, this does not mean that no *unclarity* can be there. Rather, unclarity is in

<sup>93</sup> Although I hoped to have had the opportunity to discuss in more detail this idea of the indefinite openness of meaning, and the way it relates to the temporal structure of our lives, I will not be able to do this. However, in order to briefly indicate the direction such a discussion would take, let me say a few words about the matter. As I suggested, meaning has an essential openness to it because we are, in our desire and our relationship to others, in a certain, yet essential, sense limitless. However, this also means that there is a certain essential openness to meaning with regards to the temporal structure of our lives. For the way in which we are able to make sense of ourselves and our lives at certain moments or contexts also structures the meaning of our past, as well as what the future means to us, what kind of horizon opens up for us. In this sense the openness of meaning does not abide to the logic of space and time, but rather ‘qualifies’ indefinitely anew what things have meant, what they mean, and what they will mean. I will briefly return to this theme in connection with my critical discussion on Lacan below.

this sense a different category than displacement or concealment, and it seems to me, insofar as we cannot really determine any limits to meaning, that unclarity is something that inevitably will characterise our relationship to others and the world.<sup>94</sup> But, and this is an important point, unclarity ‘as such’ between people is not, as far as I can see, the same thing as a split or a strife between an ‘inner’ and an ‘outer’. That is, *unclarity* does not ‘as such’ inform the roots of our human moral-existential self-alienation. For, as I will continue to argue, the split or strife between an ‘inner’ and an ‘outer’ is rooted in our responses (displacements) to ourselves in our relationship to the other. Unclarity ‘as such’ is something that we do not command, it is not something that must ‘as such’ stem from our responses, but is rather something—an openness, limitlessness—we ‘find’ or encounter, and to which we then must respond, answer to.<sup>95</sup>

The examination of the soul, the search for meaning, is to ask ‘who are you’, and to find out, simultaneously, who ‘I’ am—and this question does not stop repeating itself. The open, good, and rational, examination of souls is the desire to see, understand, and to be *oneself* with the other *themselves*. And this understanding also and simultaneously means that one sees oneself *in* one’s seeing the other: *one sees oneself as a ‘you’ for or even in the other*. And, importantly, as I argued in the preceding chapter, to desire to see the other’s soul is to want to be seen by the other, and *vice versa*; just as to look the other *in* the eyes *is* to be seen by the other, is to see each other<sup>96</sup>: the desire for the other is inseparable from the desire for the other’s desire.

So, then, how is it with the ‘ultimate’ character of the nakedness of the soul suggested in the eschatological tale? The tale suggests an encounter between the judge and the judged in which the ‘body’, the displaced desire for the social gaze, is non-existent. If this is meant to be a re-presentation of some feature of our actual, ‘secular’, lives, what could it stand for? In some sense, if there is truth to my reading of Plato, it seems that this openness or nakedness is something quite constitutive of the soul itself. That is, if our dissonance of the soul is one of a displacement of desire, a turning away from the nakedness (and vulnerability), then this means that the dissonance of the soul *is* a continuous displacement of something we all the time live in. If this is so, then we ought not to look—when looking for the ‘ultimate’ nature—for anything extraordinary, anything

<sup>94</sup> However, it is of course also an open question to what extent some given unclarity is in fact rooted in the way we close ourselves from the other (and ourselves) and dare not speak the truth of our desire.

<sup>95</sup> However, the same applies here as in preceding footnote.

<sup>96</sup> I owe this point to Joel Backström’s lucid portrayal of the grammar of ‘looking each other in the eyes’ (Backström 2019).

spectacular, but rather at something which is so intimately interwoven with every breath we take that we cannot really distance ourselves from it as to portray it as a separate phenomenon to be observed.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps what we are in need of are something resembling reminders, reminders that help us acknowledge something that never was *not* there. I am reminded here of a passage from Simone Weil's *The Illiad or the Poem of Force*.

Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone, that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out. If we step aside for a passer-by on the road, it is not the same thing as stepping aside to avoid a billboard; alone in our rooms, we get up, walk about, sit down again quite differently from the way we do when we have a visitor. (Weil 2005, p. 187)<sup>98</sup>

Another reminder that comes to mind is Joel Backström's example of finding oneself alone in an elevator with a stranger (Backström 2007, pp. 29-38): an occurrence where the inescapable address of the other, and the necessity of addressing the other—be it, by exchanging a 'polite' glance or greeting, or by ignoring the other—intrudes in such a forceful way. Or, do we not all know what it is to be painfully, or rejoicingly, aware of how naked and alone, that is, how together one is when, for instance, exchanging eye contact with another person? The point, for me, in all of these reminders is not that such painful or rejoiceful encounters 'logically' exclude the *possibility* of the social gaze. On the contrary, the point is that the displacing nature of the social gaze and the veiling of oneself

97 There is, I think, something true and important about Lévinas' claim that the way in which others, i.e. the "face" of the other, in a constitutive fashion touches or moves us, is not a phenomenon, something that "appears" (Lévinas & Nemo 1985, p. 85).

98 Weil continues the paragraph: "But this indefinable influence that the presence of another human being has on us is not exercised by men whom a moment of impatience can deprive of life, who can die before even thought has a chance to pass sentence on them. In their presence, people move about *as if* they were not there; they, on their side, running the risk of being reduced to nothing in a single instant, imitate nothingness in their own persons." (Weil 2005, p. 187, emphasis added). Now Weil seem to be suggesting that there are instances where the way other persons touch us in a constitutive sense vanishes; that the act of violence (the threat of killing) in an absolute sense reduces the other. One can of course in a sense understand what Weil is driving at here, namely to capture a certain description of the extremity of murderous violence. However, I think that it is important to note how this reduction of the other has the character of "as if". For it is not only the potential victim that moves about "as if" they were not there: the perpetrator does not in fact relate to the other as if they were nothing, for it is of the utmost importance for the perpetrator that he/she kills a *human being* and not any old 'object'. In this sense the same applies to the perpetrator as to the person who steps aside for a passer-by; it matters essentially whether one steps aside for, or 'kills', a billboard, or a human being.

behind one's 'appearance' is made possible exactly in relation to, as a response to, the naked openness that somehow always characterises our relationship to others.<sup>99</sup> *In this sense*, the nakedness between individuals does not (ultimately) itself *include* the social gaze. And it is in this sense I read the eschatological tale's suggestion that in the ultimate judgement—in the ultimate or *Ur*-scene of reason, the good, the will-desire—the 'body' and the displacement of desire is not *available* to us—it is what opens up the availability, the possibility of a 'defensive' response, but does not in itself contain it. Moreover, it is this nakedness that we are called to (re)turn to, to keep intact, as the 'space' in which we search for ourselves and others; search for meaning.<sup>100</sup> It is also in this spirit that I read Socrates', despite its ironic tone, nevertheless earnest response to Callicles' accusations and account of the real desire of the soul: "I realize that a person who is going to put a soul to an adequate test to see whether it lives rightly or not must have three qualities, all of which you [Callicles] have: knowledge, good will, and frankness" (487 a). In order to examine the soul in an open or naked spirit, that is, not to fear the very openness or nakedness itself, one must be courageous, which is what one is when one does not shy away from saying what one's soul desires to say. However, in order for one's frankness to really be open, and not simply a displacement strategy, a strategy for power, as it seems to be for Callicles, one must be good willed. That is, one must really care for the other's soul and want to be in the nakedness with the other, which in turn implies that one will want to understand oneself and the other (knowledge in this sense)—and here one cannot, of course, imagine the nakedness without the frankness, the courage. That is, if one has these qualities, if one dares to live in openness and hence desires to understand oneself and the other, then one simultaneously has a desire for knowledge: to be open cannot be detached from a constant search for meaning, a growing understanding of oneself, the other, society, 'the world', and also all kinds of 'practical' things that are part of our lives together. Obviously, I am not suggesting that we have to be *experts* in all

99 One might rephrase this by saying that it is the possibility of a defensive response opened up by the openness between individuals that qualifies (grammatically) openness or nakedness as 'openness' or 'nakedness'.

100 This allusion to a *return* ought to be understood, here, in a retroactive sense. That is, I am not indicating that there has been a time/episode 'at the beginning' of our lives where we were purely open/naked, which we since then have managed to lose. Rather, the point of characterising it in terms of a *return* is that what is needed here is, in a sense, an acknowledgement of what is and always was there. Only not in any specific sense, for the meaning of our lives is something that is all the time relative to the ways in which we are able to make sense of our lives ('the openness of meaning'), the way in which we are able to tie our souls undivided to our deeds and words (extended throughout the temporal axis, as well). Cf. footnote 93 above.

fields of knowledge. The point is just that to be, as it were, lazily ignorant, is to be disinterested in others, and oneself; not to be open to the meanings that exist in-between us.

To sum up, the point I have been trying to develop here is that the Platonic soul ought to be understood as one constituted through desire for the other('s desire), and that the soul's real is situated in the naked openness of the address of the other (and lack of any guarantees of reciprocity); at the very point in which the other touches and moves us, that is, moves and touches us at the very point of our own 'real' selves. Hence, the *search for meaning* belongs to the very nature of this naked openness of the real of the soul. For in the nature of this naked openness one does not find a static, solidified, kernel or substance, but rather a dynamic *relation*, the meaning of which defies any defining limits. In this sense I have suggested that Socratic philosophy—the naked examination of and between self and other—is tied to the very *Ur-scene* of the soul, namely to a 'turn to the other' and an acknowledgement of oneself in the very way, at the very point, in which one is moved by the other. Moreover, Socratic philosophy finds itself not only at this *Ur-scene*, but is itself, in its 'practice', a way of *living* this naked openness between souls, and hence a prerequisite for 'maintaining' it. This is why I argued that in Platonic terms the "discipline" of the dissonant soul *is* philosophy, and *not*—pace Augustine, Descartes, and a whole lot of other philosophers—ascetic control of the appetites/passions.

Now, as I will try to illustrate, there is a tendency in the tradition of (at least) western thought to (mis)construe the soul, meaning, the relationship to the other, the notion of the irrational and discipline, etc., in ways that depart from central features of the Platonic soul, such as I have suggested it, producing conceptions of the 'inner' or the 'real' that are forced to play *phantasmatic* games of hide-and-seek with the limits of meaning, as I suggested in chapter II that the naturalists tend to do.

Let us now then turn to see what kinds of elements we can find that generate this sort of (mis)conception and displacement.

### **The Solitary Soul and the Withering of the Real (of the Soul)**

As should have become evident over the last two chapters, I think that Descartes', as well as Augustine's and Bacon's metaphysics and their mind-body dualism share fundamental and formative elements with Plato. Most importantly, (what I will henceforth term) the Augustinian-Cartesian framework and its mind-body dualism and strife are essentially entangled with a concern with knowledge or understanding as a problem of the will, a concern that is in turn

entangled with the question of the corruption of the soul and the displacement of the will-desire. This is, I contend, what is at stake in the battle between reason and unreason. Moreover, this basic feature of the mind-body strife also contains a tension or a strife between the inner and its expression. That is, if the mind-body strife is the problem that the (real) will of the soul is, in some fundamental sense, in opposition or strife with the body, with the outer, then the concern given voice to here is a concern with how one's 'inner' and 'real' self (one's real will) can come to expression nakedly, undistorted.

Nevertheless, despite the close similarities between the Platonic and the Augustinian-Cartesian conception of the soul and the mind-body strife, there is a fundamental and decisive difference that sets them worlds apart, namely their respective conceptions of where to *turn* to in order to (re-)establish an undistorted and undivided relationship to truth, the good (of the soul's real will). In fact, it seems to me that the naturalist mind-body problem has its roots not so much in Augustinian-Cartesian mind-body dualism (after all, naturalists seem to ignore essential traits of it), as in the very way in which the Augustinian-Cartesian tradition understands the *search* for truth, and meaning. Put differently, it seems to me that the picture of the soul advocated by the Augustinian-Cartesian framework displaces the moral-existential worries informing the tension and strife between the inner and the outer, the real and appearance, and rather only sublimates them and keeps them intact. Or, as noted in chapter III, it seems to me that the Augustinian-Cartesian framework directs its focus or energy more or less solely on treating, on managing the symptom, rather than searching for the *meaning* (the reality) of the a-temporal participation in the original *act* of sin (the displacement of the will).

### *The healthy soul?*

As argued above, one can trace in Plato how the problem of knowledge as a problem of the will essentially connects to the notion of the naked openness of (the expression of) the (real of the) soul. Put differently, in Plato we can come to see how the quest of developing or acknowledging one's understanding *is*, what I called, a *search* for meaning in the naked openness in-between self and other. In the Augustinian-Cartesian framework, this essential connection becomes, however, obscured or displaced.

As suggested, one of the basic features of the problem or difficulty that is grappled with in the mind-body strife is that the essence of the soul—its real will-desire—fails to manifest and come to expression in the lives we live; we do what we see fit rather than what we want. My argument has been that Plato points towards a conception of what it means for the soul to be naked and

undivided in its expression (will). Similarly, Augustine bases his metaphysical system on the presupposition that there is such a thing as for the soul to be 'healthy', that is, that there exists a state where there is no strife between the will and the body; where the will and its expression are one. However, in contrast to Plato (as I have read him), for Augustine there is to be found no precedence in our present actual lives for what such a state is, as secular existence is, *per se*, doomed to a natural order of strife between will/soul and 'body'. One might say that the healthy, undivided soul is only a stipulated or postulated state, issued by way of negative theology ('it is not *this*, not *this*...'). Sure, our 'rational part' of the soul can 'discipline' the body and its passions/appetites, and one can become, in this sense, a virtuous and pious person. But "this is not", as Augustine proposes, "the sound health of nature, but the weakness which results from sin" (Augustine 1952a, XIV: 19, p. 391). Here on earth, the human individual remains split, in strife. What to make of this? If the soul can only express its (real) will by way of controlling and mastering the "autocratic"<sup>101</sup> movements of the body, this seems to mean that the soul expresses itself only indirectly, mediated by 'discipline', never wholly. There is always a part of oneself (resulting from original sin) that divides the self.

If this is what is indicated here, then it seems to mean that the real of the soul (will) is structurally veiled or lost to us in our lives with each other, in secular existence. That is, this would entail that there is no precedence for the meaning—no precedence of the 'phenomenon'—of what the real of the soul, its naked expression, would be. It is just a grammatical stipulation, *which nevertheless functions as the measure against which the unhealthy state is conceptualised*. Think, for instance, of Augustine's paradigmatic example of the trace of Original sin, of the conflict between the will and the movements of the flesh, namely the organs of generation; 'sexual lust'.<sup>102</sup> If, as Augustine holds, sexual intercourse is

<sup>101</sup> For Augustine, similarly to Descartes, the prime object of discipline is the appetites/passions of the soul that manifest themselves constitutively in the "autocratic" (Augustine 1952a, XIV: 17, p. 390) movements of the 'body', that is, 'body' not conceived in Platonic terms (such as I have presented it), but rather as the physical, actual, 'body' of flesh and blood.

<sup>102</sup> For Augustine, the original corruption/sin of the soul manifests itself constitutively in the organs of sex; in sexual desire. That is, it was in the organs of generation that the original sin was first noticed, as Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves in order to conceal what now had become objects of shame: this was the first sign of manifestation of the 'chain of death' (Augustine 1952a, XIV: 17, p. 390). In secular human life, this first sign of the chain of death is, according to Augustine, also experienced first-hand when by "the heat of lust" (Ibid., XIV:16, p. 390), the "members themselves" are "being moved and restrained not at our will, but by a certain independent autocracy" (Ibid, XIV: 17, p. 390). That is, the penis stands up (and so does the vagina moistens and open up? —Augustine does not speak, in this context, of the female organ), as its own "autocracy", in fleshy rebellion against the (true) will of humans, just as man originally



something that happens in Paradise, and if there is to be no ‘strife’ between the will and the erected penis, that is, if the penis never moves without the consent of the will, what does this “sound healthy of nature” really mean? What, in other words, would move us to sexual intercourse and its pleasures? Can one simply will to have sex? I mean, although we might imagine that the movements of the penis was wholly under the control of our will like any old automaton—which obviously would not be to imagine what sexual lust is—what would it be like, what would it mean to will to have sex? Would sex simply be a practical choice stemming from the ‘rational’ will to reproduce—and the penis would simply stand upright without any lust or desire, as any old automaton? Or, is it so that in Paradise one is allowed to will all that the flesh desires, so that Augustine could, as often as he pleased, walk around in Paradise with his penis happily erected without shame—all ‘restrictions’ lifted, all impotence gone? None of these, to some extent graspable and familiar ‘phenomena’, can however, at least not grammatically speaking, signify the meaning of the “sound health of nature”—although Augustine might in fact have been imagining one of these alternatives to have been *it*. For the grammatical point here seems to be that the healthy soul cannot be thought of in terms of a mixture or fusion of those ‘parts’ that now make up the shattered soul. We simply do not know, according to the Augustinian framework, what it means for the penis to move only at the consent of the will, for this belongs not to our ‘earthly’ constitution.

As noted earlier, Descartes has a quite similar conception of the soul’s predicament. According to Descartes, the natural order of the world, of embodied life, contains an unavoidable, natural, strife between mind/will and body/passions. Moreover, this means that the ethical call is to ‘discipline’ those effects of the body (the animal spirits) upon the will that are in strife with the latter. Or, the strife here is between, on the one hand, the will of the soul and, on the other hand, the autocratic/mechanical movements of the body that conflict with the will (and understanding). However, unlike Augustine, Descartes seems not to incorporate—at least not explicitly—into his system any notion at all of a (wholly) healthy soul, that is, a notion of a mind-body unity *without* natural strife. Or rather; for Descartes, a healthy soul seems to be the wholly ‘disciplined’ soul; souls that “acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions [when] sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them” (Descartes 1967b, p. 356)—just as the only mind-body union Descartes speaks of is the mind-body union of earthly existence, which is also the very arena of confused thoughts. So a ‘healthy’ soul seems to be, for Descartes, one that is trained to, as he puts it, master and possess nature, body, passions. In a healthy soul the strife remains as

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‘stood upright’ (and so, did the woman ‘open up’ to the temptations of the serpent?) in rebellion against the will of God at the moment of original sin (cf. Nicoll 2016, p. 26; de la Torre 2011, p. 77).

part of the natural order, yet it is wholly dominated, controlled. This notion obviously reflects Descartes' secular, modern, Baconian temperament. For unlike Augustine, for whom the healthy body, the healthy mind-body unity, is something found only in the new soul-body union after resurrection in the hereafter, for Descartes the body remains essentially a mere instrument for the 'rational' mind/will—just as 'nature' in general was, for both Bacon and Descartes, the raw material for human industry (cf. Proctor 1991).

So, while Augustine seems to lack the resources to give any clear sense to his notion of a healthy soul, Descartes, on the other hand, seems to give us a picture of the healthy or perfect soul as one that wholly masters and possesses the body (the *natural strife* nevertheless remaining intact). However, this 'secularising' move by Descartes, arguably, does not seem to be able to do away with the basic obscurity. That is, as far as I can see, the basic mind-body opposition that Descartes works with, and which has its roots in Platonic dualism, includes or presupposes as part of its grammar the notion of an undivided, naked, open, soul; a non-division between the soul/will and the body/expression that is free of a strife. For it is the grammatical conceivability of non-strife that gives meaning to the notion of a strife. Hence, my claim is that Descartes does not, any more than Augustine, manage to give us a clear conception of a 'healthy' soul, just as neither of them, consequently, manages to give us a clear conception of the strife either, at least not of the *cause* of the strife although they might have things to say about the *symptomatic* aspects.

In order to see more clearly how and why the Augustinian-Cartesian framework obscures or displaces the understanding of the logic of the inner-outer split and its dynamics, let us now (re)turn to consider the way in which this framework suggests that the fouls of our fundamental 'irrationality' and corruption are to be traced and true understanding (re)gained.

*Mind turns on itself: the form of ideas as linguistic expressions*

Although both Augustine and Descartes conceptualise and understand the concept of 'discipline' and that of the 'body' differently than how I have argued we can understand Plato's conception of the same, and although they have a different way of placing the notion of a healthy soul than does Plato, the thing they share with Plato is that there is some unity between, on the one hand, how to conceptualise the strife between reason and unreason, mind/soul and body, and, on the other hand, the development or acknowledgement of understanding. In other words, although Augustine and Descartes primarily conceive of 'rational

discipline' as a disciplining of the 'desiring and passionate body/flesh'<sup>103</sup>, this project of discipline is essentially developed in connection with the search for understanding. However, again, it is the way in which Augustine and Descartes imagine this search and its object that sets them apart from the Plato I have argued for.

"Experience show[s us]", Descartes writes, that we are "subject to an infinitude of errors." (Descartes 1967a, p. 172) That is, we find ourselves in the world, confused and lost. This sets the conditions for a search for truth, for philosophy. And how is it that both Augustine and Descartes suggest that we redeem ourselves of our confusion? Where are we to *turn* in order to (re)locate clarity, which both Descartes and Augustine seem to think means the attainment of *indubitable* knowledge? Their suggestion is: understanding, that is, clear and distinct ideas, are internal to the mind itself; they are essential features of the essence of mind itself. Hence, in order to search for essences, in order to search for infallible knowledge, "mind", as Descartes suggests, "turns on itself, and considers some of the ideas which it possesses in itself" (Ibid., p. 186). Likewise, for Augustine the attainment of certain or indubitable knowledge—the first principles of understanding—"is not to acquire some knowledge we do not yet possess, but rather to *think about* or attend to some knowledge we already have." (Menn 2002, pp. 251-252). That is, the soul/mind must turn on itself and try to distinguish itself "from bodies", leaving it "not simply with a list of indubitable predicates of itself, but with a knowledge of its nature or substance" (Ibid., p. 252).<sup>104</sup>

The notable difference to Plato, let us call it in 'methodological' terms, concerns exactly where to the soul turns in search for truth/meaning. Socrates turns away from *a certain form or spirit of social life* (the social gaze) to *his interlocutor* (the other person). Descartes and Augustine also turn away from the 'bustle of social life', only not to the other person, but rather to 'mind itself'. In other words, Descartes and Augustine seem to equate all interpersonal relations with the 'spirit' of the 'bustle of social life' they turn against and hence construct a self completely detached from the other person. Plato, on the other hand, never abandons the interpersonal, but rather sees the turning towards the other person as "the true political craft" (*Gorgias*, 521d), as a form of 'true sociality'. Now what I will argue is that the Augustinian-Cartesian 'turn on mind itself' does not in fact manage to turn away from the 'social', away from the *object* of their discontent, but rather ends up reproducing it. Put differently, my suggestion will

<sup>103</sup> Compare this to the notion of Platonic rational discipline I developed in the preceding section.

<sup>104</sup> See also Menn (2002), especially pp. 251-253, for an account of how close Augustine's conception of the essence of the soul was to Descartes'.

be that instead of forming a genuine critique of the 'social' that incarnates the inherent human corruption, the Augustinian-Cartesian framework ends up articulating the, so to speak, 'pure form' of the self as it manifests in the 'spirit of the social', as it is conditioned in the (displaced) dynamics of desire for the social gaze.

Augustine and Descartes hold that mind finds, not only the infallible answer to the Delphic command 'know thy self', but also more generally, the foundations of understanding or indubitable knowledge, by turning on itself. That is, by turning on itself, by turning away from, distinguishing itself from 'bodies', reason or the rational soul protects itself, detaches itself, from the corruptive/irrational effects of the "autocratic" movements of the 'body' and (once more) encounters truth, the good. However, and this is something contemporary naturalist seem not to have noticed at all, the mind's turning on itself and finding through this turn—'in itself'—its own essential or indubitable truth, and the foundations of all other indubitable truths as well, is *not* a turn to a 'private subjective' mind. Rather, what the (singular) mind encounters in this turning on itself is its 'universal form'. Let us take a closer look at this.

Consider, for instance, Descartes' observation in the fifth meditation on the nature of a clear and distinct idea of geometrical forms (cf. the discussion on the difference between understanding and the faculty of imagination on pp. 83-86 above):

For example, when I imagine a triangle, although there may nowhere in the world be such a figure outside my thought, or ever have been, there is nevertheless in this figure a certain determinate nature, form, or essence, which is immutable and eternal, *which I have not invented, and which in no wise depends on my mind*, as appears from the fact that diverse properties of that triangle can be demonstrated, viz. that its three angles are equal to two right angles, that the greatest side is subtended by the greatest angle, and the like, which now, whether I wish it or do not wish it, I recognize very clearly as pertaining to it, although I never thought of the matter at all when I imagined a triangle for the first time, and which therefore cannot be said to have been invented by me. (Descartes 1967a, p. 180, emphasis added).

The clear and distinct ideas that the mind finds in itself—which means 'independently' of body, 'independently' of the faculty of imagination (psychology)—are not to be understood as arising or originating in some, pace Searle, subjective "first-person ontology" (Searle 2002, p. 47). Rather, the universal (objective) forms constitute the ideas 'in the mind', and (subjective) psychology or the faculty of imagination is essentially tied to or determined by

these. And, what is the *understanding* of the clear and distinct idea of, say, a triangle? It cannot be the ‘image’ of a triangle, let alone any triangle one finds or experiences ‘in the world’, perhaps drawn on a piece of paper. Instead, the universal objective form of the idea of a triangle is the very mathematical notation (the concepts and their grammar) that identifies and defines the idea of the triangle: the idea is indistinguishable from the notation, from the concepts. Importantly, the same applies to the first principle of philosophy itself “cogito, ergo sum”: the form of the first principle of philosophy is indistinguishable from the very grammar of the sentence itself. Put differently, “cogito, ergo sum”—its grammar—is the form and content of the first principle of philosophy; not something ‘beyond’ the words, but rather the universal, metaphysical, truth or meaning of the concepts themselves.<sup>105</sup> Hence, there are no clear and distinct thoughts/ideas without notational form, without ‘language’, because clear and distinct thoughts are about ‘something’, namely the *meaning* of concepts. To clearly and distinctly understand something, say, ‘mind’, ‘soul’, ‘I’, ‘exist’, ‘God’, or ‘body’, *is* to understand the metaphysical, the higher, the indubitable, meaning of the concepts/signs, which themselves *are* the ideas.<sup>106</sup> As John Cottingham notes, the Cartesian mind does not, cannot, constitute a “semantic privacy” (Cottingham 2008, p. 115). Rather, it has a “publicly accessible structure” (Ibid., p. 117).

Stephen Menn observes that this same basic formula can be found in Augustine. For Augustine, the pursuit of indubitable knowledge or understanding is not the pursuit of ‘new’ knowledge, but rather, in a Platonic and Neo-Platonist fashion, a form of recollection; the acknowledgement of the “higher” truth hidden or implicit in “the ordinary use of language” (Menn 2002, p. 251). As Augustine notes:

When [the mind] hear[s] the command: “Know thyself”, how will it be able to carry it out if it does not know what “know” means, and what “thyself” means? [... ] But when it is said to the mind: “know thyself”, it knows itself at the very instant in which it understands the word “thyself”; and it knows itself for no other reason than that it is present to itself. But if it does not understand what is said, it certainly does not obey this command. And, therefore, it does what it is commanded to do when it understands the command itself. (Augustine 2002, X:9, pp. 53–54)

<sup>105</sup> With respect to the unity of form and content/ideas in Descartes, Lilli Alanen points out that “Descartes view conforms broadly to the Aristotelian view [as opposed to the Platonic view]” (Alanen 2003, p. 131).

<sup>106</sup> This is also, to note, the reason why Descartes held that language use was the only ‘external’ sign of the mind/soul. See e.g. Alanen (2003, p. 83).

So as we can see, for Augustine, as for Descartes, the indubitable knowledge or understanding of the essence of the self is inseparable from the very understanding of the grammar of the concepts ‘self’, ‘know’, ‘exist’, ‘I exist’, etc. Or again, the very form of the clear and distinct ideas *is* the (higher, metaphysical) meaning of the concepts or linguistic expressions.

*‘It’ speaks: ordinary language, metaphysical meaning, and the displacement of the self*

The understanding is internal to the grammar of the concepts themselves. That is, the understanding of any single mind is determined by the idea *in* its universal form and not the other way around. Or, alternatively, the understanding of any singular mind *is* the understanding of an idea, in its inseparable linguistic/notational form.<sup>107</sup> Hence, the singular mind does not arbitrarily, privately, subjectively, determine meaning in an original act of creation. Rather, the singular mind finds or acknowledges meaning. This is, at least in Descartes’ mind, what guarantees the universality and objectivity of his first principle of philosophy and knowledge more generally: anyone that applies their mind to the methodologically determined meditations on first philosophy, will end up with the same conclusions as Descartes (cf. Descartes 1967c).

But what kind of a picture of language and meaning does this amount to, and how does it effect, or qualify, the nature of the mind or soul? It surely is not by accident that Wittgenstein—one of the great champions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘linguistic turn’—chooses to open his *Philosophical Investigations* with a passage from Augustine’s *Confessions*, a passage that has become known as ‘The Augustinian Picture of Language’. The passage reads as follows:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had

<sup>107</sup> Here I am ascribing, to Descartes, a somewhat stronger relationship between thought and linguistic expression/language than for instance Lilli Alanen (2003) does.

trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires. (Wittgenstein 1953, §1, p. 2E)<sup>108</sup>

Undoubtedly, this ‘picture of language’ is far from simple and contains at least three central elements, which we will discuss in successive steps. As I will attempt to show, omitting one of these three basic elements results in a gap, which in turn leaves the two remaining elements in conflict or tension with each other, rendering this more or less simple and acceptable characterisation or picture of language loaded with paradox and polarisation. Moreover, which of these elements tend to be omitted in philosophical discourse (beginning with Augustine himself) is symptomatic of the moral-existential trouble with desire we have been discussing in the previous chapter. But as said, we will come to all of this in due time. Right now, we will begin by directing our focus on one of these elements, namely the child’s/individual’s own understanding.

There is a clear suggestion in the ‘Augustinian picture of language’ that the individual, the infant, is always-already equipped with its own desires and will, originating in God. “I, longing by cries and broken accents and various motions of my limbs to express my thoughts, that so I might have my will, and yet unable to express all I willed, or to whom I willed, did myself, by the understanding which Thou, my God, gavest me, practise the sounds in my memory” (Augustine 1952a, I: 13, p. 4).<sup>109</sup> In other words, one aspect of this picture of language portrays the child as self-equipped with understanding *independently* of and *prior to* its relationship to its parents, as well as *independently* of and *prior to* the

108 I do not know which English edition of the *Confessions* is used by the translator of the *Investigations*, but it is not the one I will be using. In the translation I use the same passage reads as follows: “When they named anything, and as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing, and no other, was plain from the motion of their body, the natural language, as it were, of all nations, expressed by the countenance, glances of the eye, gestures of the limbs, and tones of the voice, indicating the affections of the mind as it pursues, possesses, rejects, or shuns. And thus by constantly hearing words, as they occurred in various sentences, I collected gradually for what they stood; and, having broken in my mouth to these signs, I thereby gave utterance to my will.” (Augustine 1952b, I:13, p. 4; the section numbering in my translation/edition differs from the one used in the *Investigations*).

109 It should be noted that Wittgenstein does not cite this section in the opening remark of the *Investigations*. I do not claim that Wittgenstein reasoned the way I do. Moreover, as David Stern stresses, “the opening of the *Philosophical Investigations* invites a multiplicity of readings” both of Augustine’s words and of Wittgenstein’s discussion of them (Stern 2004, p. 72). My intention here is not to provide an exhaustive interpretation of all that is at stake in Augustine’s philosophy of language.

language through which it becomes able to, or forced to, express itself, to make itself understood to others.

But what is the position of the subject or individual here? And here we introduce the second element. One learns language from one's parents, who in turn of course have learned it from their parents, and so on. This seems to incite a picture of 'ordinary' language, of 'ordinary' meaning, as rooted in 'social conventions'. What then is it to learn a language, to be able to speak meaningfully? The Augustinian picture—with the third element, which we will come to, omitted—seems to suggest the following: to learn a language, to make sense, is to find the right word for an "object", be it an object 'in the world' or an 'inner' object of thought and/or desire. So, when the correct connection between what one desires to say (the "object" that is desired) and a sign (convention) is established, one can be said to speak a language, to mean something. However, as both Augustine and Descartes would hold, the meaning that is established on such grounds, that is, the (alleged) 'ordinary' sense of a word, sentence, proposition, etc., in fact lacks in meaning (error and sin as privation), or, alternatively, fails to acknowledge, recognise, the higher, essential, metaphysical, meaning. As Descartes notes, "experience shows" us that we are "subject to an infinitude of errors" (Descartes 1967a, p. 172), mainly because "[o]ur [ordinary] language is primarily designed to describe bodies" (Menn 2002, p. 251). Hence, we are called to abandon the meanings of ordinary language, meanings that are "accepted on authority" (Ibid., p. 251), and turn on mind itself in order to find another and higher authority, one beyond the social conventions of a given 'language community'. We are called, as Descartes (1967c) informs us, to tear down the conventions of knowledge to their foundations so that they might be built up on secure ground. Nevertheless, the picture provided here *simultaneously* presupposes that there is, despite the inherent corruption and displacement of ordinary language, an essential connection between the meanings of ordinary language and that of metaphysics. For the higher, metaphysical truth or meaning that both Augustine and Descartes long for is, nonetheless, the meaning or truth of 'I', 'mind', 'body', 'existence', and so on, words that are originally, as Augustine informs us, handed to us by our parents, and ultimately by 'society' (i.e. *doxa*). The metaphysician is not out to invent or stipulate new words, new concepts, new meanings. Rather, the aim of Augustinian-Cartesian metaphysics is to unveil the 'real' meanings that are already inherent in, lie at the very core of, well, ordinary language. In short, we find here an entanglement between God/metaphysical meaning ↔ the individual ↔ societal conventions/ordinary language, where ordinary language embodies both the clear and distinct ideas that pertain to mind itself *as well as* the displacement or corruption that is inherent in human embodied life. So, the picture of language we are dealing with here seems to suggest that the minds of individuals cannot but give expression



to those ideas that pertain to mind itself (the ‘positive’ or true aspect of ordinary language), although, because of the inherent corruption of the human soul, the “misuse of the free will”, individuals add onto these meanings things/meanings (‘bodies’) that do not as such belong to the ideas themselves (the ‘negative’ aspect of ordinary language). Hence, the search for truth or metaphysical meaning is not the invention of anything new, or an adding of yet undiscovered elements or aspects, but rather the subtraction of all those elements that in fact do not pertain to the ideas ‘themselves’. This is Descartes’ method of hyperbolic doubt in a nutshell, and to a great extent Augustine’s as well (Menn 2002).

Let us now dive into the internal tensions of this picture. We begin with a few notes on the essential structure of the soul or self. As noted, in turning on mind itself the individual mind turns to the universal structure of mind; it finds ideas that are *given* as part of its very own structure. That is, the individual mind does not create meaning; it does not constitute a self-sufficient entity. Rather, the individual mind is more like a vessel for, a mediator or an instance of, the ideas themselves: human beings are something intermediate between God and nought: the singular, finite, mind is not its own cause or origin; its origin is God. In this sense, one might say that it is not the individual mind/soul that speaks or means something, for it is the ideas that speak for themselves: ‘it’ speaks, while the individual reports them as they are found in the mind. On the other hand, one must remember that there is, nevertheless, no way of separating the essence of the individual mind/soul from the ideas internal to it. It is in fact misleading to speak of a vessel here, as a picture of a vessel presupposes a notion of an independent soul or mind that *contains* something different from itself. Instead one ought to emphasise that the essence of mind/soul/self is not an independent, self-sufficient, entity. Rather, the very substance/essence of mind is the (singular) expression of the understanding of clear and distinct ideas originating in God. This is the, let us call it epistemic-ontological equivalent to the ethico-theological claim that the highest freedom of the individual is to resign one’s own will (reduce all non-essential traits) in favour of God’s: “not My will, but Yours be done” (Holy bible; Luke 22:42). In clear and distinct understanding the embodied human being does not speak. It is the ideas themselves that do so.

Once more, what I am claiming is that the Augustinian-Cartesian soul is not a private soul, fundamentally or essentially comprised of a “subjective ontology”, but is rather authored by the universal form of ideas. However, as I will try to show, contemporary naturalists are not completely wrong in attributing to Descartes their (‘folk-psychological’) conception of the essence of the mind as private and the related mind-body problem. That is, although contemporary naturalists in a quite ignorant way think of Descartes as articulating a conception of mind as closed on itself and detached from objective reality, I will try to show that the Augustinian-Cartesian notion of the soul and its relationship to meaning fails to acknowledge its own essential presupposition

and thus, in suggesting that truth and meaning are to be sought by turning on mind itself, in fact create a picture of the mind/soul as detached from the very sources of its own meaning. Consequently, I will argue, the essence of the Augustinian-Cartesian mind/self becomes empty, a nothing, just as the 'subjective mind' of the naturalists.

Consider the following features that I have identified as internal to the Augustinian-Cartesian picture of the soul and of meaning. Since the truth that metaphysics is supposed to uncover or acknowledge *is* the truth of the *meaning* of concepts in ordinary language, metaphysical truth is 'grounded' in ordinary language. Moreover, this means that higher or metaphysical truth presupposes that we do, also and already, understand *correctly* the meanings of ordinary language. But how exactly are we to understand this relationship between ordinary and metaphysical language and meaning? What is it to learn, correctly, ordinary language, to understand the 'ordinary' meanings of our words?

Let us go back to the Augustinian picture of language, and to the two central elements or aspects of it, namely the inert understanding (and desire) of the *individual* and the socio-historical conventions of language. What is the tension that these two are pushed into, when left alone together? Consider remarks 143-147 of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, where the question of how one teaches and learns the series of natural numbers is discussed. The focus of these remarks is on what one might call "public training" (cf. Eldridge 1997, pp. 242-290), a training that goes gradually from helping the child to copy the series from 0 to 9 to the drawing of the child's attention to the recurrence of "the first series in the units; and then to its recurrence in the tens" (Wittgenstein 1953, §144, p. 57e). And now Wittgenstein introduces a voice that suggests, or reminds us, that in every step of the learning process, "the application [of the series] is a criterion of understanding" (Ibid., §146, p. 58e). However, this suggestion is intertwined with the following observation, which intimates unsettling consequences.

Now, however, let us suppose that after some efforts on the teacher's part [the pupil] continues the series correctly, that is, as we do it. So now we can say he has mastered the system.—But how far need he continue the series for us to have the right to say that? Clearly you cannot state a limit here. (Wittgenstein 1953, §145, p. 57e)

And how many times, we might add, must the child apply the series correctly before we can, *with certainty*, say that she has understood? —We cannot state a limit here! But now, if we cannot state a definite limit to how many times the series must be applied correctly, it seems that we completely lose hold of any conclusive understanding as to who is, and who is not, applying the series according to the 'right rules'—given, that is, that we are principally looking at

things from the perspective opened by the suggested picture. Consequently, we also seem to lose hold of how to determine, or understand, the criteria of what counts as the ‘right rules’. That is, we seem to lose hold of a conception of when we can say that an individual—any and all individuals—have learned a language and understood the meaning of ‘ordinary’ language. What will redeem us from such uncertainty, from such indeterminacy of meaning and understanding? For *if* “the application [of the series] is a criterion of understanding” then this seems to mean, given the indeterminacy of the criterion, that the only way to account for the acquisition of language—the possibility of meaning something in ‘ordinary’ language—is by reference to how the individual is ‘accepted’ by the language community as one who has understood; that is, how an ‘outer’, secular, earthly, *authority* judges the situation. So, in order for the individual to be part of a language community, to speak meaningfully, to grasp even the meaning of ‘ordinary’ language, the individual has to accept the *authority* of the language community, *and*, perhaps more importantly (but more disturbingly), be accepted by it. To learn a language, to mean something, is simply to say, to affirm, to repeat, what the authority of language community instantiates.<sup>110</sup>

What the above seems to suggest, then, is that to learn the *correct* use/meaning of a word/language does not, cannot, involve the individual's own understanding. It is not the individual who speaks or means, but rather it is the socio-historical language community that speaks the individual's understanding. Now the central question here is of course, then, how one is supposed to move from the sphere of the ordinary to that of the higher/metaphysical, *if* one does not introduce some sense of individual understanding as part of the constitutive event of meaning. We need, in other words, to attribute some form of understanding to the individual that is not reducible to the norms and conventions of a given language community, if we are to overcome the corruption/displacement inherent in the ordinary. We need to introduce something that breaks the speech of the ordinary and turns to the higher, the essential. And, perhaps even more so, the individual desperately struggles to find herself.

“But how can it be?”, a dissident voice cries out. “When *I* say that I understand the rule of a series, I am surely not saying so because I have *found out* that up to now I have applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! In my own case at all events I surely know that I mean such-and-such a series; it

110 It is of course important to note that the very structure of this picture closely resembles the Augustinian-Cartesian picture I drew above. Namely, exchange the authority of the language community for that of God, and we have our metaphysical truth/meaning. That is, the search for higher or metaphysical meaning is the replacement of one authority for another: the ‘it speaks’ of ordinary language replaced by, transfigured into, the ‘it speaks’ of the clear and distinct ideas internal to mind itself.

doesn't matter how far I have actually developed it." (Wittgenstein 1953, § 147, p. 58e) And imagine then to be told that "grasping a rule [...] is *not* an *interpretation*, but [...] is exhibited in what we call '*obeying a rule*' and 'going against it'" (Ibid., § 201, p. 81e, last emphasis added). And then, furthermore, being told that "it is not possible to obey a rule '*privately*'" (Ibid., § 202, p. 81e). What is left of the individual, of her understanding and desire, in the face of this all-consuming 'we', this Leviathan? How can we, under such (conceptual) circumstances ever talk about any understanding at all?

So, once more, the challenge and tension in the Augustinian-Cartesian framework is this. If the *correct* ordinary uses of words/language are a presupposition for metaphysics, and if, simultaneously, the ordinary is fully determined by the 'other' of the socio-historical language community, and furthermore, if, nonetheless, the ordinary is pregnant with corruption or displacement, how and where is the individual and her understanding supposed to enter as a force to break the hold of the displacement of the ordinary, of *doxa*? Left to themselves, these two elements or aspects of the Augustinian-Cartesian framework are destined to remain more or less incommensurable, in conflict.

### *The omitted real of desire*

In defence of the Augustinian picture of language, it must, however, be noted that in addition to the two elements or aspects discussed above, the picture contains a third, decisive, element of understanding that situates itself, as it were, in-between the individual and the other. Recall the following decisive passage from the Augustinian picture: "When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something." Notice that it is not only the individual's own 'inner' understanding and desire that is presupposed in this picture. For what the picture essentially presupposes is that the child always-already understands *the parents*; the child understands what they, the parents, are doing, their intentions, the expressions on their faces, their "state of mind". Moreover, this understanding is part and parcel of the *desire* of the child for the parents' desire; part and parcel of the very form in which it turns to the parent as someone to speak to, to be heard by, to be seen by. And, further, the understanding that is presupposed is a *mutual* understanding *between* the parents and the child. For not only does the possibility of *correctly* connecting a desire or

thought with a word hinge on the child's ability to understand the "natural language of all peoples" that "expresses", in a basic manner, the parents' "state of mind". It hinges just as much on the parents' mutual understanding of the child, for otherwise the parents would be completely incapable of teaching the child the correct uses of words since they would be completely at odds as to what the child was intending with its "bodily movements". That is, if the parents would *not* understand the child, it would be nothing short of a miraculous accident that the right word was attached to its proper object (thought, desire). Consequently, it would be just as miraculous—in fact the same miracle—that any 'metaphysical understanding' of a concept would find its proper object, its proper idea, since (according to the Augustinian-Cartesian framework) the metaphysical meaning-understanding of, say, mind *is* the metaphysical meaning-understanding of, well, 'mind'.

Now the point I want to raise here is that the Augustinian picture of language presupposes—although this is not anything either Augustine or Descartes seems to acknowledge—that *individuals* understand *each other*, and that only when this is so can 'ordinary' language be a medium of meaning or thought and, consequently, only then can there be any place for metaphysical meaning. Or, put otherwise, this picture of language presupposes that in order to connect (correctly) a thought or a desire to a word (convention), that is, to establish an 'ordinary' meaning to concepts (e.g. 'chair', 'hungry', 'I', 'think', 'exist') individuals must always-already understand *each other*. Or, even more to the point; the meaning that words will have hinges on the understanding between individuals (parent and child, in this case). Conversely, if there is no understanding between individuals, if one does not understand, from the very outset, the other as someone who has something to say, understand that the other directs herself to me, addresses and touches me—understand the very act of directing towards *someone*, understand the very act of *someone* directing attention to something—language cannot be what it is for us. That is, if there is no basic shared understanding between individuals, language loses its sense since our basic initiation into language is based on—the (hideous) reality—that someone says, expresses, something to another. The point here is, then, I suggest, that the Augustinian picture of language *in fact* proposes—although the Augustinian-Cartesian framework unconsciously omits it—that the very idea of language constituting a split between, on the one hand, the meaning that each individual privately hosts and attaches to words and, on the other hand, the 'function' of words/language that fantastically manages to align all the different subjective conceptions/worlds into a (more or less) functioning system of 'social' relations/conventions, fails to acknowledge the interpersonal essence of language and simultaneously the core from which the moral-existential concern with language and meaning springs. If a basic understanding between

individuals is lacking, then meaning (both ordinary and metaphysical), as the object of the philosophical-existential concern, becomes obsolete, empty, incomprehensible.

But why then is it that this third and decisive element is omitted in the Augustinian-Cartesian framework? My suggestion is that the ‘answer’ to this lies in the terrible prospect that it suggests, namely that the basic understanding between individuals leans on nothing but the (hideous) reality of desire as portrayed in the previous chapter. For what the Augustinian picture of language in fact, although unconsciously, proposes is that meaning and understanding build and depend on, what I have called naked or open expression between individuals. In order for the individual’s desire to travel all the way with expression to the other and through the “natural language of all peoples” convey its “state of mind”, that is, for this expression to hit its target, namely the desire of the other, the other must be open to this desire and desire back. However, as pointed out, this cannot be commanded or guaranteed. The basic understanding *between* individuals hinges on nothing but this openness to the other(’s desire). This is what terrifies both Socrates’ interlocutors and the interlocutors of the *Investigations*.

If what I am arguing for here makes sense, we might come with the following suggestion. It is the hideous reality of desire that motivates the third element of the ‘Augustinian picture of language’—the ‘given’ understanding *between* parent and child—to so persistently resist conscious acknowledgement, leaving intact only the competing notions of ‘inner’ versus ‘outer’ meaning. For while the meaning-understanding *between* individuals hinges only on the hideous reality of desire, the phantasmatic ideals of the ‘unquestionable authority’ of either external objective rules or inner private objects, are strategic possibilities for avoiding, for repressing the openness of and the responsibility for the reality of desire. And, moreover, the result of repression is always paradoxes, inconsistency.

### *The Cartesian ‘I’ as the pure form of the displacement of desire*

The Augustinian-Cartesian suggestion is, of course, that the turning on mind itself is a turn that presupposes and utilises the understanding of ordinary language. That is, since the solitary meditations is one conducted in language, and, as it were, about it, this is the guarantee of its universality. In other words, anyone who understands ordinary language, will also understand the first

principle of philosophy.<sup>111</sup> Conversely, if one does not understand ordinary language, one does not have a mind, and thus cannot understand anything at all. Perhaps we may grant the Augustinian-Cartesian project this. However, the quintessential problem that, as far as I can see, cannot be overcome concerns the status of the indubitable principle of philosophy, as contained in the Augustinian-Cartesian project: How is the *solitary* turn on mind itself supposed to avoid becoming simply a sublimation of the ordinary, that is, a sublimation *also* of the error and sin, the corruption, of the ordinary, against which the project claims to rebel? Descartes' claim is that in the first principle of philosophy we hit rock bottom, that here we cannot err. But what guarantees that the very form of the proposition "I think, therefore I exist" is not itself expressive of corruption? That is, what is it that says that the tautology, the infallibility, of "cogito, ergo sum" is not *the very form of the corruption of the ordinary*, since the metaphysical must be grounded in the ordinary? In fact, is this not exactly what is the case? Is it not exactly a sublimation of the 'ordinary' that is produced when one takes the 'ordinary', the 'social conventions', as the conceptual starting point of meaning—omitting the way in which the *Ur*-scene of meaning-understanding is situated in-between the desire of individuals—and strips it to its 'pure form'? Is it not so that the solitary turning on mind itself is in fact not at all a radical or critical movement, but rather a, let us call it, conservative movement, a movement to conserve the 'pure form' of the ordinary? Is it not the 'pure form' of displacement of desire inherent in the 'ordinary' that we meet in the first principle of philosophy?

What are my reasons for such a suggestion? Perhaps it might be formulated the in following way. If the metaphysical is grounded in and presupposes the ordinary, and if the ordinary is supposed to presuppose understanding, and this understanding is what philosophy seeks, and if what corrupts the ordinary are those things ('bodies') that 'are added onto' the understanding, and if the understanding of the ordinary is in some constitutive sense inseparable from the understanding between individuals—as I have argued is presupposed in the Augustinian-Cartesian picture of language—*then* it seems that the things or 'bodies' (the corruption of the ordinary) that are added onto understanding are things/meanings that is added onto and displace the constitutive, naked and open understanding (and desire) *between individuals*. In short, the corruption of the ordinary is not something that is added onto a 'pure form' or idea (metaphysical meaning), but rather onto the understanding *between individuals*. Put differently, the 'pure form' of the ordinary, which is impregnated with the corruption or displacement of the soul (as both Augustine and Descartes

111 As Descartes notes: "To speak the truth, I see nothing in all that I have just said which by the light of nature is not manifest to anyone who desires to think attentively on the subject." (Descartes 1967a, p. 167)

declares), is expressive of the displacement of the understanding between individuals; the real of desire. Consequently as long as one simply attempts to strip ordinary meaning to its 'pure form' (as Augustine and Descartes do), and, moreover, turns away from the other person (making the other person irrelevant, reducible<sup>112</sup>) into solitary meditation, this seems to imply that the metaphysical meaning one then encounters (in mind itself) will just be the pure form of the displacement, and not of the real itself—that is, not meaning as it is fleshed out in the naked in-betweenness of souls.

The pure 'I' of the *cogito* thus only restates, in its pure form, the 'symptom' of the 'ordinary' (conceived of as reducible to social conventions, social customs) by asserting itself as *independent* of its relationship to other individuals. That is, it only restates the symptom of the ordinary by displacing its very own conditions of sense and the desire inseparably conjoined with it. It asserts, instead of searching the naked openness and understanding between individuals—the *Ur*-scene of meaning-understanding—itsself as a formal entity/identity; reduces the self to an affirmable (uniform) entity, and identity, that is determined by the very form of 'ordinary language'. In short, alluding to the preceding chapter, the pure, solitary, 'I' of the *cogito*, seems to be the pure form of the displacement of one's desire for the other('s desire) and this desire's transformation to a desire for the affirmation of a 'form', an identity, an 'it', that is seen, not by the other *person*, but rather by the social gaze; the individual in the eyes of the social gaze. As already pointed out, exchange the authority of the language community for that of God and you have metaphysical truth/meaning. That is, the search for Augustinian-Cartesian higher or metaphysical meaning is the replacement of one authority for another: the 'it speaks' of ordinary language replaced by, transfigured into, the 'it speaks' of the clear and distinct ideas internal to mind itself.

### Turning to the *Ur*-scene of Meaning

Now, my reading of Plato presents him as someone who attempts to turn not on mind itself, but to the, what I call, *Ur*-scene of meaning in the search for the true, the good, and the beautiful. Rather than turning away from the other person into

<sup>112</sup> In his Meditation on First Philosophy Descartes thinks the outer world, the existence of bodies, to be irrelevant for the essence of the mind. What he does not acknowledge, or does not thematise, is that in this 'reduction' of the outer world and bodies also the other *person* is reduced to the same status as 'bodies'. And when Descartes then 'brings back' the corporeal world by way of 'proving' their existence, the other *person* does not enter in any way as significant, but remains but another thing among things.



solitary monologue, Plato presents a way in which to turn away from a certain spirit of the social *without* simultaneously displacing the other person with whom our minds, our souls, and language/meaning, are essentially conjoined through desire. At the risk of once again repeating myself, I nevertheless want to illustrate how the proposed Socratic-Platonic conception of philosophy as a search for meaning through the other, answers to the deadlocks of the Augustinian-Cartesian, as well as the naturalist, conceptions of the essence of mind, meaning, and philosophy.

Let us briefly rehearse the Augustinian picture of language. As I suggested, we can read it, not as an attempt to explain *how* meaning and understanding are produced, but rather as indicating that *to the extent* that there is (any) meaning, *there is*, always-already, an understanding—between individuals, that is. Meaning and understanding—between individuals—are grammatically inseparable. Consequently, the suggested *Ur*-scene of language consists of the inseparable entanglement of interpersonal understanding with the ‘forms of communication’. In some sense the ‘forms of communication’ are historically conditioned; one is born into a language community and the words, the concepts in one’s life have a history, a history that in some way is tied to norms, to conventions, to ‘forms of life’. However, these norms and convention of a language community, nevertheless, in some way answer to the interpersonal understanding and the desire with which one turns to another person. Alternatively, as long as, and to the extent that, two people *understand* each other, whatever signs they use for expressing this understanding and desire *is* the meaning or understanding that is shared. A simple example of this is that children commonly either mispronounce or invent their own words for different things and events. For example, my son had a very peculiar word for ‘rice cake’, ‘uiapapa’, which nevertheless did not hinder or distort any understanding between us, exactly because it functioned as a word only given that we understood each other. As one might put it, the ‘function’ of the word was expressive of our understanding. This is of course a primitive, ‘self-evident’, and, some might think, trivial point. However, the ‘depth’ of it lies, perhaps, precisely in its primitiveness, that is, in its illustration that meaning can do just fine simply with understanding between individuals. Or; its ‘depth’ lies with its suggestion that interpersonal understanding might be a ‘basic concept’ that does not hide anything (a more complex structure) ‘beneath’ or ‘within’ it, but rather sets conditions for a discourse of meaning. In this sense, a central aspect of the historically conditioned norms and conventions of a specific language community are, on some basic level, the form of interpersonal relations; of interpersonal understanding and, also, misunderstanding. At least this is what I take the Augustinian picture of language to *imply*—although the Augustinian-Cartesian framework simultaneously evades this very feature.

Nevertheless, as the Augustinian-Cartesian—as well as the Platonic—picture of the soul suggests, human life is, from the very outset, always-already inflicted with displacement, confusion. So, in the picture I am now attributing to Augustine and Descartes—and Plato as well (with this specific feature in mind)—this original sin of the human soul, the displacement of desire, is what *also* gets solidified into the (form, conventions) of language. The displacement of desire is, in other words, what *also* becomes, or always-already (Original sin) is part of the interpersonal and therefrom, of the social structures of society and/or culture. Arguably, when displacement of desire transmutes into social structures, it begins to live a life of its own, creating new levels and features of displacement, confusion, and power structures. This is why the philosopher must turn away from the ‘social’ practices of ‘ordinary’ language and seek the underlying, although simultaneously always present, basic conditions of meaning and understanding. *If* there is meaning, *then* there is understanding; so if you search for understanding you will find meaning, and *vice versa*: this is the basic formula of philosophy.

Although, as I have pointed out several times, the Socratic-Platonic conception of the search for truth, meaning, the good, cannot provide us with any (phantasmatic) guarantees of an improvement of our lives (the good), its indisputable merit, in contrast to the Augustinian-Cartesian framework, lies in the way in which it turns our search for meaning and understanding to the very *Ur*-scene of the same. That is, it understands the search for meaning as played out in-between individuals. However, again, the philosophical search for meaning cannot simply be conceived as a *return* to the scene of interpersonal engagement, for as such, the interpersonal is exactly where the displacement *also* (originally) takes place. Rather, it is a search by which the bodies or images<sup>113</sup> of displacement are exposed (through discourse), and worked through (hopefully). In this sense, we must not understand the notion of *Ur*-scene as a return to a past, to the ‘actual’ scene when we first started engaging with meaning and understanding. Rather it is turn to the *scene* of meaning, that is, the scene where meaning, desire, and displacement are *nakedly alive*.

*“Logic must take care of itself”*

Let me try to, afresh, illustrate what I mean by saying that meaning is *nakedly alive* only to the extent that it finds itself (re)connected with the understanding

113 In this respect the Platonic search for meaning is similar to the Augustinian-Cartesian project, only that the understanding of what the displacement, the bodies/images, are, differs essentially.

between individuals. Someone says ‘the mind is private’. Now, has something meaningful been said or not? If someone says this to *me*, then *I* would probably respond by simply asking what this person wants to say; ‘what do you mean’, or ‘what are you trying to tell me’, *I* would ask.<sup>114</sup> However, what is it that makes such a response sensible, meaningful? That is, how can *I* ask this *other person* to explain herself? Ought *I* not consult the concepts themselves, to look up what they mean and then search for what such a sentence means—that is, ought *I* not turn on mind itself, the pure form of the idea? What has the other person to do with what is said? Where is the grammar of this utterance to be located?

In Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, the opening remarks quoted from Augustine is followed by the proposal that the picture of language that it contains suggests that “words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names”, that is, that “[e]very word has a meaning” and “[t]his meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.” (Wittgenstein 1953, §1, p. 2e., emphasis added). If this is what is suggested, and if it has any appeal to us, to anyone, then it seems to suggest that there is only *one*, definite, metaphysical, thing that my interlocutor’s utterance ‘the mind is private’ can succeed in meaning, or fail to do so. This is, in the interpretation *I* have offered, why both Augustine and Descartes think that there is *one* thing, or substance, that underlies and is the metaphysical meaning of, e.g. (the object) ‘*I*’. Their metaphysics (perhaps all metaphysics) is, as one might put it, ‘object-orientated’. Again, *if* this would be true, *then* it would seem superfluous to turn to the person who says ‘the mind is private’, and asking for what is said. What has this other person to do with that! —‘*It*’, that is, language speaks.

However, let us assume that it does make sense to respond to the sentence ‘the mind is private’ by asking for a clarification of what the *other* intends to mean. Let us, in other words, assume that we do something meaningful when we respond to others in this way. The other person says “by ‘the mind is private’ *I* mean this ...”. Here we then have an attempt by the other to define, by virtue of her own understanding, by reference to her own beliefs and claims, what is being said. However, what has changed here with respect to the above? Not much. At

<sup>114</sup> Alternatively, given the specific context of this utterance, *I* might simply reply ‘it sure is’. For it might for instance be the case that the sentence ‘the mind is private’ was said in connection with a game in which one tries to guess what or who the other person is thinking of, with quite poor success. To understand the meaning of this sentence, that is, to (in central respects) understand the other, is, here, to understand, let us say, the frustration, or the joy, of the other *in* her playing the game with you. On the other hand, *I* might of course answer the naturalist *claim* ‘the mind is private’ by the same words ‘it sure is’, and hold myself to be in complete agreement with, to think that *I* clearly understand, the claim, which *I*, arguably, would not do. The point here is: in order to understand the meaning of words, we must understand what is being said. And, what is being said depends, in turn, on our understanding. Not a vicious circle, but rather the basic nature of the grammar of understanding.

least not if we insist, like some philosophers seem to be doing (e.g. Hacker 1986), that whatever can be said meaningfully must obey the ‘rules of language’; that the rules of language dictate the boundaries or sense of language use. For if this is the case, then what *can* be said with this *particular* use of the sentence ‘the mind is private’ does not depend either on the other person or on me, or the way *we understand each other*, as whatever this understanding *can* be is determined by what the ‘rules of language’ allow for to be said (‘meaningfully’). It is as if the only thing open for *us* is simply to choose from a list of possible uses, or then to stipulate a completely new use.<sup>115</sup> Or; it seems, now, that the rules determine what our understanding of each other *can* be.

Let us presume that I do turn to the ‘rules of language’. What am I to do exactly? To look at how ‘we’, how ‘our’ language community talks, to discern the grammar of our “form of life”<sup>116</sup>? But how can these “rules”, or our “forms of life”, *as rules or common forms of life*, tell whether or not the definition attempted by my interlocutor of ‘the mind is private’ makes sense? Why would the “rules”, or “forms of life”, have any problems with adding this or that new linguistic use, or claim, or theory, or anything, to its lists, to its form? The point I am trying to make here is simply that neither rules nor forms of life care about what is said or not said. People, on the other hand, do care quite a bit, sometimes all too much, that rules are followed, that forms of life are kept intact, etc. And, this care for rules or forms of life can be expressive of a care for the other, who says ‘the mind is private’ and attempts to mean by it ‘this ...’, or it can be expressive of hostility, of evasion, of displacement.

Be that how it may, what seems to fall out of sight in such a picture is the question to what extent we understand *each other*, to what extent we understand what is being said by the other, or left unsaid. Or, perhaps more precisely, what gets omitted here is the question as to how we respond to this other person who turns to us, and how this other person does it. By this I want to say that the idea

<sup>115</sup> But this would, of course, in itself already require that the individuals involved would have to understand each other, independently of the newly stipulated rules/use—in order for the stipulation to have a use.

<sup>116</sup> Perhaps the central passage in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* where the term “form of life” appears is remark 241, which reads: “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?”—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.” (Wittgenstein 1953, §241, p. 88e). The following remark continues with the famous lines: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.” (Ibid., §242, p. 88e) Now as will become evident below, I am not opposing the idea that language has certain rules, or that meaningful speech is essentially tied to a form of life. My critical point is more directed at what kind of sense or position such notions have in how we think about meaning/understanding.

that understanding between individuals is determined by rules of language or forms of life, suggests that we already know, have determined, what understanding between individuals can be, and thus, what words can mean. And, likewise, to suggest, as Peter Hacker does, that the rules of language govern our language use, and that there is nothing “inadequate” with our everyday uses of words “relative to the purpose they serve” (Bennett & Hacker 2003, 6), seems to suggest that the meaning of what we do is already once and for all clear to us, already determined and settled.<sup>117</sup> Now the point here is not to say that ‘whatever’ can be said to have meaning—that our language, its grammar, lacks form. Rather, the point is simply to say—to repeat—that the *understanding between individuals* is the condition for what is, and what is not, meaningful, not the rules of language or forms of life. The ‘rules of language’ might, of course, to a large extent be expressive of understanding, but they *also* contain our confusions and displacements of understanding, to the extent there are such.<sup>118</sup>

It is perhaps also in this context important to note that placing this much emphasis on the notion of interpersonal *understanding*, as I have done, risks portraying a picture of meaning and language in an all too narrowly, let us call it, ‘cognitive’ or ‘intellectual’ manner. That is, it risks narrowing down what I am attempting to capture with ‘interpersonal understanding’. It is in fact Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* that brings this to my attention. Consider for instance the following cluster of remarks:

Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs. (Wittgenstein 1953, § 496, p. 138 e.)

The rules of grammar may be called “arbitrary”, if that is to mean that the *aim* of the grammar is nothing but that of the language. If someone says

<sup>117</sup> One is of course tempted to respond to Hacker's suggestion by saying ‘Yes, exactly! But what is the purpose it serves?’ For if the rules of language is the expression of language use, and if this use is the meaning of words, and, further, if the uses of words are adequate relative to the purpose they serve, then it seems that the purpose language use serves is supposed to account for the language use (the rules) while, simultaneously, the rules or language use is supposed to account for the meaning of the purpose. For further thoughts on this, see Toivakainen (2017).

<sup>118</sup> I am reminded here of a remark in the *Investigations*, which reads as follows: “The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language.—Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be *deep*\* (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.)

"If our language had not this grammar, it could not express these facts"—it should be asked what "*could*" means here. (Ibid., §497, p. 138 e.)

When I say that the orders "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk" make sense, but not the combination "Milk me sugar", that does not mean that the utterance of this combination of words has no effect. And if its effect is that the other person stares at me and gapes, I don't on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect that I wanted to produce. (Ibid., § 498, p. 138 e.)

To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for. (Ibid., § 499, pp. 138-139)

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation. (Ibid., § 500, p. 139 e.)

To begin with, although it is always risky to *extract* remarks from the *Investigations*<sup>119</sup>, it seems to me that the considerations brought to light in these remarks point towards the same kind of disenchantment that I am suggesting of the notion that the rules of language or forms of life would set the *conditions* for what things mean (can mean) and what kind of understanding can be there between individuals. They disenchant it by, as it were, widening the horizon of language *use*, of meaning and understanding, to the "effects" language has upon us through the other, and *vice versa*. Thinking of language in terms of "effects" is, arguably, not meant to comprise a better *theory* of language; as if what our understanding was in need of was some instrument of explanation about an external object, namely 'language', 'meaning', 'understanding'. So, to the extent we do not think of meaning or language as something external to us, but rather as something within which we all the time dwell, then we do not seem to be in need of an explanation or theory (a certain external mastery) but rather in need of some form of acknowledgement of what it is that we do when we turn to

119 For more on this topic, see Wallgren (2013); Stern (2004); Schulte (2006).

others and give expression to whatever it is we desire to express.<sup>120</sup> In this sense, I take Wittgenstein's remarks as *descriptions* and *reminders* of what goes on in our lives with others, and how language situates itself into it in specific ways. Hence, the remarks above help us pay attention to how central our desire to affect—to touch, to move—others, and, to be affected by—to be touched and moved by—others is for what language *is*. That is, the *meaning* of language is not only to 'make sense', in the sense of applying the correct criteria for the uses of language. In fact, making sense (in this sense) can be quite beside the point or meaning of what is 'done' in language, without making it senseless, meaningless. To search for meaning, to make sense, to understand what people (oneself included) are doing when they speak, or write, is, also and importantly, to try to understand what a person is *doing*, and how one is moved by it.

Let us say that my friend says to me "milk me sugar". Obviously depending a bit on the context and who this friend is for me, that is, what our relationship is like, I would most probably understand the other as implying some kind of ironic, sardonic, flirting, etc., erotic gesture (to produce this effect on me). I am not sure if Wittgenstein had this in mind, that is, I am not sure what the stare and gape he was thinking of were about. Perhaps he was simply imagining a person's bafflement at hearing the senseless utterance where it was not expected, *but clearly intended (to touch, move)*. It is easy to think of many different options for what might be happening in such a situation, again, depending on the context and the relationship of the two individuals in the picture. Nonetheless, a central thing to pay attention to here is the understanding between individuals that is presupposed in the production of "effects" upon the other. First, the other must already be *someone* for us. That is to say, we must already understand the other as someone who turns to us and says something, to us; someone whose utterance is meaningful, significant, *independently* of what he or she happens to say. Only when this is in place (and how could we think it away?), is it possible for us to even react or respond to "milk me sugar", let alone be baffled by it: the bafflement is 'proof' of the sense, the "effect", the touch, of the other; proof of the understanding. That is, in our understanding of the utterance as baffling, as an ironic gesture, as a flirtation, as a grunt, or whatever, we understand the other as *someone* having this effect upon us through/in the expression. Obviously, for all kinds of reasons we might 'get it wrong'. However, the understanding that is there between us is the condition for 'getting it right', as well as the condition for 'getting it wrong'. Again, there is no predetermined limit or form as to how to produce "effects" in others, or what effects can be produced, just as one can, for instance, express one's love for the other in indefinite many ways, and yet, sometimes, when one does love the other and expresses this without hesitation,

120 See Cavell (1999) for a lengthy treatment of the theme of acknowledgement.

the idea of considering alternative expressions does not announce itself because the other understands, is moved by, exactly *this* way in which one has expressed one's love. Or; what love *means* does not have any predetermined limits, but is rather bound to how people do love and can love each other, and what this can mean for lovers.<sup>121</sup>

Now, one *can* of course say that the 'rules of language' are the *description* of every meaningful utterance and that this description would simultaneously also describe, or be internal to, a form of life. And, this would be *tautologically* true. However, and as far as I can see, it would simply—no more and no less—mean that, in paraphrasing Wittgenstein, "the rules of language must take care of itself"<sup>122</sup>. Or, alluding to the quotes above, "Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs." That is—I am arguing—the rules of language, or grammar, does not *determine* what we must mean, but rather orders itself after what we 'do with language' and the understanding—and its lack and distortion—that is there between people. The *form* understanding—and its lack and distortion—acquires, or is expressed in, *is* the form (the rules) of meaning.<sup>123</sup> Or; the understanding (and misunderstandings) between individuals—the 'effects' of speech of one person upon another—*is* the *Ur*-scene of meaning to which *meaningful* language use (and its 'rules', conventions, etc.) ultimately answer.<sup>124</sup> How well we do, in fact, understand each other and ourselves, that is, how much meaning we are able to acknowledge and generate, is evidently an open question. It is a task, as one might say, without putting into question the very fact that we cannot unthink our interpersonal understanding *if*, and to the extent *that* we are moved by others. —And what would it be like, in an 'absolute' sense, *not* to be moved by others? What would it be like for another person to be as unnoticeable, as deprived of meaning, as any contingent speck of air somewhere up in the sky? Another, related, question is: "if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say

121 Not to forget, of course, neither is there any predetermined limit as to what kinds of different uses the word 'love' can have; how it can move oneself and the other. That is, the deployment or use of the word 'love' need not have anything to do with love.

122 The original text reads, "Logic must take care of itself." (Wittgenstein 1933, § 5.473, p.127)

123 The similarity with the theory of evolution: it only describes the form life has taken, but does not *explain* the semantics of life; does not explain life's meaning.

124 Let me note here, just in case, that this 'picture' is what I believe informs the Platonic conception of the soul-understanding-meaning, and also, although in a misplaced fashion, the Augustinian-Cartesian conception of the same. Moreover, I derive support for this picture—as a picture that answers to, is tied to, the concern with the soul's split or dissonance—from Wittgenstein's *Investigations* and find myself thinking—because, after all, I am defending this picture—that there lies an important truth to it.



what I am drawing it for.” (Wittgenstein 1953, § 499, pp. 138–139) That we do affect each other, that we are affected by each other, does not mean that we understand, does not mean that we are willing to understand, clearly, what we are doing. But *if* we do move and are moved by each other, *then* there is something we are doing or something the other is doing; then there is something to understand, something that means something, and this presupposes that we already understand each other as ‘bearers of meaning’. Language, meaning, is constituted upon the way we touch and move each other. This is what meaning, amongst other things, *means*.

*The fantasy of a private language as the displaced desire for open expressiveness*

Just now I said that we cannot unthink our interpersonal understanding if we, and to the extent that we are moved by each other. But suppose that my interlocutor, who told me that ‘the mind is private’, continued her definition by saying ‘by this I mean that which is only there for me to privately introspect, only there in my own immediate experience.’ Would this not exactly be to unthink the essential entanglement between interpersonal understanding and meaning? Perhaps we might call it an *attempt* to unthink such an entanglement. However, the attempt here seems to be underpinned by an internal split. That is, it seems to be underpinned by an urge that nevertheless does not really aim to, desire to unthink the entanglement between the interpersonal and meaning, despite professing wanting just this—more or less the way Calicles professes to desire the position of a tyrant, while his initial/real desire and position in fact, grammatically, speaks against it.

My interlocutor tells me that the mind is private in the sense given just now. Why does she tell *me* this? What am *I* to do with these sounds coming from her mouth? Why would, how *could* her words be *meant* for *me*? Nonetheless, this other person turns to me; she wants *her* words to touch me, to mean something to me. Does she want to be understood by me? But why then does she simultaneously want to make it impossible for me to understand her? What kind of a turning to me is this?

The setup of such an imagined scenario is brilliantly captured in Wittgenstein’s so-called ‘private language argument’ (usually taken to span roughly remarks 243–304 of the *Investigations*), especially in remark 293:

Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case!—Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle”. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.—Here it would be

quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word “beetle” had a use in these people’s language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can ‘divide through’ by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. (Wittgenstein 1953, §293, p. 100e)

There is of course nothing surprising about the fact that the grammar of the fantasy entails that the ‘inner object’ becomes irrelevant. That is, it should not be surprising that the ‘inner’ becomes completely irrelevant for what happens *between individuals*, insofar as the meaning of the inner is supposed to be available exclusively to the individual herself. This is simply a tautology. And what is the problem with the ‘inner’ dropping out of consideration? Obviously, there would be no problem here, nothing self-undermining, so long as there would be no *desire* for the ‘inner’ to play a part—an essential part—in one’s relationship to the other; play a part in our interpersonal understanding, in the way we move and touch each other. For as long as everyone just keeps saying—but to whom, and why?—that “beetle” is whatever is ‘in the box’, what relevance does it have for anything, especially if it is meant *not* to have any relevance; as long as the ‘inner’ is not meant to have, ‘in itself’, any effect upon others.—Why could one not have this ‘picture’ of the inner for oneself (cf. Wittgenstein 1953, §295, pp. 100–101e)!

However, everyone keeps on saying *to each other* that the ‘inner’ is private. And if they wouldn’t, what would there be to discuss. Why, how, could we even care? So the suggestion that “the word ‘beetle’ had a use [cf. “effect”] in these people’s language”, is not so much introducing a new possibility, as it is a kind of acknowledgement of what is already contained *in the fantasy of a private language itself*. Put differently, one can find in remark 293 the suggestion that the *fantasy* of a private language does not, in fact, have as its object a private language, but rather conceals or displaces, as one might put it, the truth of the displacement that it itself *is*.

“Yes, but there is *something* there all the same accompanying my cry of pain. And it is on account of that that I utter it. And this something is what is important—and frightful.” (Ibid., § 296, p. 101 e.) The grip that the picture of meaning as wholly determined by ‘outer criteria’ has on the interlocutor, their fear of losing the real of their desire, is what shocks them about the tautologically displaced nature of the fantasy. Both the irrelevance of the inner

object, as well as the immense relevance of this irrelevance, depend on the interlocutor's desire to have the 'inner' as an essential part of the way words touch and affect others. In other words, what shocks us is that the effect we desire to have upon the other, the way in which we desire to move and touch the other—and be moved and touched by the other—is in fact displaced by our very fantasy, that is, by ourselves. So, *where the fantasy of a private language 'fails'—where it reveals its displacement—is where my desire to reach out to the other with the naked openness of my soul begins—or always-already was.* In short, the desire concealed and displaced in the fantasy of a private language is a desire for expressive openness between individual; the desire that one's 'inner' travel all the way with expression to the other's 'inner'.<sup>125</sup>

What I want to claim, then, is that the fantasy of private meaning is a displaced desire, not only in the sense of being internally in contradiction with another desire—that is, with the desire to be with the other *in* meaning. More precisely, the fantasy for private meaning *is* the displacement of desire for the other's desire. As put forth already in the previous section, the desire for open expressiveness—which underpins the displaced desire for private meaning—is a desire for the other's desire in the following precise sense. For the inner (desire) to travel all the way with expression to the other, for this expression to hit its target, namely the desire of the other('s desire for one's own desire), the other must be open to this inner, to my desire. So again, the basic understanding *between* individuals hinges on nothing but this openness to the other('s desire). And, consequently, the phantasmatic ideals of the 'unquestionable authority' of either external objective rules or inner private objects become strategic tools for avoiding, for repressing, the openness of and the responsibility for the reality of desire.

Take the following example as an—for sure, simplified—illustration of *one* way in which the logic and dynamic we have been discussing enters our lives. Imagine a couple whose relationship is to some extent characterised by a form that contains as part of itself the concealing of certain aspects of each of the partners; certain thoughts, desires, etc. Life nevertheless continues on, and the *form* of the relationship becomes more and more, let us say, fixed around the axis of the concealed, the unspoken. —Might one perhaps say that it is as if the form of the relationship has become the life between the lovers, a life now 'slave' to the form? It is as if logic or grammar no longer took care of itself, but rather started demanding that *life* take care of itself, that is, that life abide to the dictates of

<sup>125</sup> There are three other articles in which I have worked on Wittgenstein's so-called Private Language Argument. All three shed a bit different light on the matter, and might provide a bit richer picture of the depths of the "argument". See Toivakainen (2012; 2017; 2019). For similar kinds of readings of the Private Language Argument, see Mulhall (2007); Reed (2019).

form; as if it was the form that spoke ('it' speaks), and not the *life* between the individuals.

Here we then are, me and my partner, divided from each other by our respective 'outer'. Or, is it not rather: divided by our respective 'inner'. I have a, either conscious or unconscious, burning ache in my heart to open up to my partner. My concealed desire creeps into my dreams. They come out in forms of aggression, hostility, depression, anxiety, etc. To spell out this ache, these dreams, this anger, this anxiety, these disappointments, this fear, would be to reveal my 'inner', to make it understood, to show myself, nakedly, openly, to her. Conversely, *assuming* that my 'inner' is incomprehensible, necessarily unattainable to her, is to fall helpless into the abyss of the inner-outer divide in order to, perhaps, secure the affirmation provided by the *form* of the relationship.

Undoubtedly, the fear that naked, open desire will be unanswered is real. Or, it is a real possibility. And, moreover, the source of the gap between self and other, the inner and expression, is, as is the reality of desire, twofold. It rests not solely on *my* unwillingness to be open. For my words, my desire, is for *you*, and this is why you have to be open to me. And if you are not ready to open up with me, how could what I say, the words I use, ever hit, as it were, their target, namely *your* naked soul? How could my words, any words, in such a case not but fall short of (the real of) my desire? Put differently, how could my words find their meaning? For in turning to you I do not yet or clearly know what I want and what I have to say. Rather, my own clarity, my will-desire, is bound to the understanding between *us*, to the desire with which I turn to you and you turn to me. I might have courage enough to openly spell out those desires that I have kept hidden from you and yet, what I spell out is but the beginning. That is, what I spell out is not yet a clear meaning, it is not yet my *will*, for the meaning of my turning to you is bound to what my turning to you means for us: my will is bound to your will through my desire for your desire. Once again, my (inner) meaning, my desire, does not belong to me. Rather, it belongs to you, and finds its home only when you open the door for it.

The point of this example is just to illustrate *one* way in which the logic and dynamic of a 'hidden private inner', and the split between the 'inner' and its expression, enters our lives. For to the extent that opening up to each other has become inconceivable (not in logical terms, although perhaps masked as a logical impossibility), it has become mutually inconceivable how one's inner could ever travel with one's expressions; how the other could see one's soul, how the gap between the inner and the outer could be bridged. Alternatively, to the extent that it seems inconceivable that the other would be open to one's 'inner', it seems equally inconceivable that the inner and the outer could be bridged. That is, to the extent that the opening up between individuals is *felt* to be impossible—to the extent that one *assumes* the position that the opening up between individuals

is impossible—words become disassociated from the inner, from understanding, from meaning, while only the *form*, the ‘it’, is left to speak.<sup>126</sup>

Again, the point here is to illustrate *one* way in which a turn away from a naked openness between individuals creates a kind of oscillating dichotomy and tension between a hidden, private, ‘inner’ and a determining, intrusive, ‘outer’ form. Moreover, the point here is that the very incommensurability of these two poles of the dichotomy is not something that is there as a ‘real’ part of reality, but rather something that is construed as a defence against reality, against the ‘real of desire’.

But is there, perhaps, another picture, another logic or dynamic that would tell us another story, one that would show us that at the very heart of our inner-outer split there lies, in fact, a real incommensurability, a real structural feature of reality?

### **Lacan and the Fate of the Real**

It is out of respect for the writings of Jacques Lacan, and the tradition of thought he builds on and has contributed to, that I want to discuss his theory of (decentred) subjectivity. More specifically, Lacan’s, or the Lacanian, theory of subjectivity centres—amongst other things—around the same kinds of questions that I have been dwelling upon, yet, as far as I can see, suggests a somewhat different conception of the soul and the reasons for its split or self-alienation. It must, however, be noted that I will not be able to do justice to the complexity and intricacies of either Lacan’s own writings (and seminars), or of those of his ‘followers’, not to speak of the diversity of interpretations that his ‘followers’ comprise. Despite this clear lack in my treatment of Lacan’s thoughts, I will nevertheless attempt to develop a specifically targeted discussion on what I understand to be the quintessential deadlock that emerges out of Lacan’s theoretical development. This deadlock, I suggest, is, on the one hand, part and parcel of the very sense of the theory of the structure of the subject—it is an essential part of the theory itself—while, on the other hand, it signals the deadlock or moot point at the heart of Lacan’s thinking. Such a targeted treatment, while obviously lacking in lengthy exposés of the different stages of Lacan’s thought, and of the different interpretations that have followed, will hopefully nevertheless prove its relevance for the questions we have been

<sup>126</sup> Keep in mind the distinction that was drawn on pp. 185–186 between, on the one hand, concealment and displacement as the root of an ‘inner-outer split’ and, on the other hand, *unclarity*.

discussing throughout this thesis. To what extent I will succeed in this is of course an open question—just as it would be with the most detailed, exegetical, account.

Perhaps the best way of crystallising the essential difference I want to claim that exists between, on the one hand, the way I have presented the dynamics of the soul and its split/alienation and, on the other hand, the way (I understand that) Lacan(ians) understands the same, would be the following. As far as I am able to comprehend, Lacan's theory of subjectivity amounts to the claim that, what is called the 'real' of the subject is ultimately utterly indifferent to meaning. The subject and its desire, on the other hand, are formed in and through the "symbolic"; the subject is, so to speak, a sense-making being. Consequently, situated at the very intersection of the real (indifference to meaning) and the symbolic (meaning producing), the subject is always-already self-alienated or decentred. Moreover, this lack at the heart of the subject being is, because of its desire, masked "as the result of an ultimately external prohibition" (Žižek 2019; Lacan 1999).

Conversely, in my view the Lacanian claim that the real ultimately resists being made sense of—and so even lacks existence (Lacan 2016, p. 115)—seems to be informed by a, dare I say, displaced picture of what it means for something to make sense; what it means for something to *mean* something. So, rather than the real (of desire) failing to ultimately make *sense*, ultimately lacking *meaning*, my suggestion is that what we ultimately lack, what ultimately does not lend itself to us—because it lacks *sense*—are final 'explanations' of *meaning-understanding, desire, and our displacement of desire*. These escape any ultimate account or explanation in that they, rather than being independent objects of comparison, pre-condition and set in motion the moral-existential dynamics of the soul. Moreover, rather than ultimately lacking in sense, they are, as one might put it, so absolutely and endlessly meaningful that making sense of them never stops. In contrast, then, to the Lacanian suggestion that a real impossibility is masked as the result of an ultimately external prohibition, what I have been developing throughout this thesis suggests that, although it is true that what is construed as a logical impossibility is simultaneously treated as a restriction, as a lack or limitation (e.g. "one *cannot* see the mind"), the very *construction* of the notion of a logical impossibility, that is, the very assumption of the position that there is a logical impossibility here, is, however, in fact one that masks a restriction, not so much imposed upon us as assumed by us. In other words, it masks a profound unwillingness and displacement.

### *The decentred subject*

My “crystallisation” just now obviously remains quite cryptic, perhaps incomprehensible, at least to those unfamiliar with Lacan’s thoughts. Let me thus try to give some flesh to these bare bones. To start, it is perhaps advisable to give a quick, and simple, depiction of the conception of the subject that the Lacanian theory turns against and ‘decentres’. In his second seminar, *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan notes: “I am explaining to you that it is in as much as he is committed to a play of symbols, to a symbolic world, that man is a decentred subject.” (Lacan 1988, p. 47). This decentred nature of the subject as construed through the symbolic world or order is contrasted “to individual experience” (Ibid., p. 43). Or; “the subject’s life is oriented according to a problematic which isn’t that of his actual experience” (Ibid., p. 43). Hence, the subject is structured on and around its other, or rather the (big) Other: conscious experience is structured in relation to, or divided from, the unconscious, which in turn is, as Lacan famously declares, “structured like a language” (Lacan 1993, p. 167); “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.” (Lacan 2001a, p. 130)

Now if the unconscious signals that the subject is structured through or in relation to the Symbolic order, this means that the subject’s (alleged) actual *conscious* experience has the form of what we might call a sovereign self; a self of unity, consistency, self-sufficiency; of *oneness*. The underpinning (il)logic of this conscious experience is perhaps best captured in the so-called Cartesian conception of the ego or ‘I’, where the metaphysical meaning of the signifier ‘I’ is the unitary substance *res cogitans*; as if the ‘I’ or self is what it is, means what it means, because of itself, because of its own ‘metaphysical’ existence. Or, it might be captured in the fantasy of a private language, where the phantasmatic proposal is that the meaning of a word, a signifier, *is*, self-sufficiently, the very private experience; the meaning *is* the (private) object and can be directly derived from it. Or, more broadly speaking, it might be captured in the Augustinian picture of language, in the sense and to the extent that it takes the *meaning* of words to directly correlate with objects. In contrast, then, Lacan observes that “[t]he subject can be defined in a correct way only through that which forms a relation, through that which means that a subject is a signifier inasmuch as he is represented alongside another signifier.” (Lacan 2016, p. 133) So, as one might put it, the truth of the unconscious is that the subject is not itself its own sovereign, but rather subject to the *order* of the symbolic, the “big Other”. Put differently, and with a somewhat different emphasis, according to the Lacanian view each individual is under a spell of, enchanted by, a “fundamental fantasy” that being a subject means being ‘one’, being an independent, self-sufficient, some*One*. So, Lacan argues, while being in some sense an unavoidable part of the very structure of subjectivity, this self-conception is, nevertheless, a

misplacement or misrecognition; a fantasy. For in fact, rather than comprising a self-sufficient totality, the conscious 'I' is always structured by or essentially entangled with the other, the (big) Other (as Descartes himself, in a sense, acknowledges). The subject is, in its essence, "decentred"; its very being conditioned by a fundamental lack. Or, to put it differently, as the subject is constituted in and through the symbolic order, and as the signifier is always what it is in relation to another signifier, the subject (as a signifier) is essentially a sense-making being. Yet, the notion of being a signifier-in-itself—which the subject urges to be—cannot be made sense of. Consequently, the subject is constituted around a kind of fundamental "pure void of negativity" pertaining to the very structure or (il)logic of the subject's being (Žižek 1997, p. 122).<sup>127</sup>

There are certainly different ways in which one might go about depicting the basic structure, as suggested by Lacan, which gives rise to the decentred nature of the subject and its masquerade of totality or unity. I will begin by drawing attention to the dialectical, and (allegedly) incommensurable, entanglements of need-demand-desire.<sup>128</sup> The picture is more or less this: in the 'beginning' the individual has/had something we might call "instinctual needs" (Fryer 2004, p. 93; 208), which it craved to satisfy. However, and especially in the case of humans, the satisfaction of these needs depends on, and comes through, the other, primarily the mother—the caretaker and nurturer. That is, in order to satisfy its needs, the child must call upon the (m)other—articulate its needs, give them a

127 There is, to note, a sense in which this Lacanian formula is the very same formula as found in Descartes' conception of the embodied human being. Namely, the *human* (embodied) being—the subject—is the very point of the incommensurable; the body *is* the absolute non-self of the self/mind, and the human subject is the point of this (impossible/incomprehensible) union (cf. Descartes 1967a; see also chapter III above). I might already here point out that one of my central critiques of Lacanian theory will be that it, as far as I can see, in the end attempts to produce an explanation/account of the split of the human mind/soul in purely structural or ontological terms. Now, as I have tried to illustrate, the Augustinian-Cartesian picture is divided in that it, on the one hand, does seem to account for the mind-body split/strife in purely formal terms—and exactly in terms of a "pure void of negativity" (error and sin are, formally speaking, pure privation, and the body, somehow the manifestation of this pure negativity)—while, on the other hand, they also seem to acknowledge that the pure formal account is, as one might put it, descriptive rather than explanatory. That is, the formal account does not explain why formal or structural conditions in fact 'result' in the soul's displacement, for this must be accounted for—although cannot be explained (away)—in terms of an *active* "misuse of the will".

128 I chose this approach partly because it surfaced already in the preceding chapter in the context of my 'defence' of Callicles, and Nietzsche. The crux of the difference between what Nietzsche and Callicles seems to believe, on the one hand, and what Lacan offers us, on the other hand, is that while the former claim that the notion of a purely non-reactive, purely self-sufficient, subject is possible, Lacan suggests, in a somewhat Hobbsean fashion, that each individual subject in fact 'necessarily' falls short of such a fantasy. Being a subject is always being subject to the Other.



(proto-)symbolic form (Lacan 2001b)—to satisfy them as the child is unable to do so independently. Consequently, enjoyment comes, from the very beginning, through the (m)other and has, constitutively, the form of “partial” enjoyments. That is, through her touch the (m)other marks or signifies the child’s ‘body’ as comprised of different (partial) areas or places of (partial) enjoyment (Verhaeghe 2009, p. 58–60)<sup>129</sup>. Moreover, as the satisfaction of needs is both dependent on the (m)other as well as enjoyment ‘introduced’ by and through the (m)other, the child’s enjoyment and, as it were, sense of self, becomes inseparable from the (m)other(’s own desires). This, allegedly, marks, or is always-already the form of a fundamental impotence or lack of the subject, a lack that necessarily transposes need into demand: the child *demand*s satisfaction of needs through the (m)other. Or; through the intervention, that is, through the care and touch of the (m)other, enjoyment becomes possible, with, however, the additional cost of *revealing* to the child its own lack, its impotence; through her markings on the body the (m)other is perceived, unconsciously, phantasmatically, by the child as castrating the undisturbed unity, totality, omnipotence, which preceded being as being-through-the-(m)other (Verhaeghe 2002; 2009). Moreover, and because of this, the transposition of need into demand is marked by the emergence of an incommensurable gap between need and demand, as the dependency upon the (m)other generates a kind of double function to the (m)other as both the satisfier of needs *and* as the one that possesses/owns enjoyment itself (as the one that is not castrated). Because of the (alleged) immanent lack (the dependency upon the other), the child cannot separate demand from the (m)other: the child demands an ‘unconditional love from the (m)other’, a love that attempts to fill in the gap of the now ‘perceived’ separation between need and demand. In other words, although a certain need is satisfied, this satisfaction never answers to demand, as the satisfaction of the demand never fills the fundamental lack, that is, never *includes* the phantasmatic unconditional love of the (m)other; the (self-sufficient) means to enjoyment. This is the advent of desire, namely the surplus of the gap between need and demand (Fryer 2004, pp. 93–94). The child desires the (m)other’s desire, which nevertheless is not *as such* part of the Real of enjoyment; the desire for the other’s desire is a surplus, a function of the child’s own fundamental, yet at the same time phantasmatic lack. Consequently, the child, in its fantasy, strives to be/become the irresistible object (the *phallus*) of the (m)other’s desire.

It is important to keep in mind that the incommensurable relations need-demand-desire hinge on a kind of fundamental fantasy, namely on the fantasy of the sense of the possibility of bridging the gap between need and demand. What

129 It is also because of this that the (m)other, or “The Woman” remains, in the unconscious structure of subject’s psyche, the original “master signifier”, God (Lacan 2016, p. 108; Verhaeghe 2009)

would such a bridging be, that is, what would it be to do away with the, alleged, fundamental lack of the subject? The phantasmatic picture here is, structurally speaking, the same as in the naturalist mind-body problem. Namely, the negation of the lack would entail negating the separation between self and (m)other. One would, in other words, be oneself simultaneously as being the other, that is, possessing/merging with the other's powers/potency. For only by becoming completely unified, only by absolutely merging with the (m)other, that is, only by completely merging with the 'ideal' of the Other, would enjoyment be total, omnipotent; only then would the gap between need and demand be abolished. This total unity, this absolute oneness, is, as Lorenzo Chiesa puts it, "the supposition of a mythical substance that enjoys itself absolutely [...] the positing of an imaginary absolute *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the body as One" (Chiesa 2016, pp. 7-8). However, this fantasy contains its own contradiction for the subject whose fantasy it is. That is, the fantasy of becoming One, total, *is* the fantasy of annihilating one's very subjectivity/individuality, *and* one's desire, as subjectivity and desire exist only in and as *separation* (of self from the (m)other).

While we will soon come back to the issue in more detail, suffice to say at this point that it is this very (death)drive that marks the impossibility of the fantasy (cf. Lacan 2016, p. 106). Put differently, the *subject's* desire for anything at all depends on the very *impossibility* of the "absolutely self-enjoying substance" (Chiesa 2016, p. 8)—and the *subject's* existence cannot be separated from its desire. Here, as we might note, we come back the issue of prohibition mentioned just a while ago, namely the Lacanian idea that an impossibility is masked as a prohibition. For if the structure of desire conditioned upon a desire for the phantasmatic (m)other—the surplus of the gap between need and demand—then the impossibility cannot consciously be seen for what it is, as this would absolutely discharge desire. Rather, this impossibility at the heart of desire must be masked as a prohibition, which keeps alive the phantasmatic possibility that if the prohibition were transgressed then total enjoyment would be possible, desire fulfilled. The mask of prohibition, in other words, keeps alive desire by keeping alive the unconscious fantasy that desire would have an ultimate *object*, although, simultaneously, this phantasmatic object is the demise of desire. Or, conversely, desire is never really about its *object*, but rather about keeping itself alive; getting more of itself. As Žižek puts it, "desire's *raison d'être* (or 'utility function', to use Richard Dawkins's term) is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire." (Žižek 1997, p. 39)

Already in this, perhaps all too dense exhibition of the structure of the subject through the incommensurable entanglements of need-demand-desire, we can anticipate or recognise the central deadlock that the Lacanian theory of subjectivity introduces, on the one hand as an essential feature of the very structure of subjectivity itself, but, on the other hand, also as a deadlock in which

it itself becomes entrapped—or so I will argue. That is, if desire depends on a fundamental fantasy about the ‘existence’ of what Lacan calls the Real (Lacan 2016), and if we nevertheless can understand the object of desire, the “existence” of the Real, to be a fantasy, an impossibility behind the mask of prohibition, what are we to do with this fantasy, this Real? Are we meant to dupe ourselves? Is it that “we need fictions and illusions to survive” (Žižek 2019), as Lacan seems to have suggest at the final stages of his work by introducing the idea that instead of “belief in the symptom”, we need “identification with the symptom” (Verhaeghe 2009, pp. 96-97)?

*The Real-Imaginary-Symbolic and temporal reversal through sense-making*

In order to get a clearer grip of this deadlock we need to come to appreciate that the chain need-demand-desire and more generally, the structure of subjectivity—as proposed by Lacan—must be understood as a (temporal and semantic) retroactive construction. That is, the psychoanalytical(ly informed) knowledge of the subject’s ‘past’, with its stages and events of alienation/misrecognition, is something that is in fact immanent to the subject *in analysis* (Fryer 2004; Žižek 1991). Put otherwise, the meaning that is construed/found out in the psychoanalytic setting *is* what the past *becomes*. However, it is important to emphasise that when we speak of a ‘construction’ here, this is not to be understood as a kind of *projection* of ‘present’ meanings onto—and thus altering—past ones. Rather, psychoanalytic knowledge is a making-sense of the *lack* of meaning in past events, which repetitively keep informing themselves in the psyche of the subject. The basic idea here is more or less as follows. There is a traumatic event in one’s life. What makes it traumatic is, first, that it is somehow significant and plays on the subject’s desire. Secondly, the event does not become integrated into the web of meanings upon which the subject structures its *conscious* self. The traumas/lack of sense consequently becomes part of the subject’s *unconscious*, creating a repetitive symptomatic structure beneath the conscious self where the trauma constantly seeks (unconsciously) to be made sense of. When sense is ‘produced’, the repetitive symptom ceases/dissolves. To take an over-generalised and over-simplified example, we might think of parent that responds expressively—and repeatedly—with certain degree of disgust to its defecating child. Lacking any ‘natural’ or logical/necessary link between faeces and disgust, the parent’s response remains an enigma to the child, who in seeking the desire of the parent (most likely; displacement of desire) comes to assume an object position, misplacedly think of itself as somehow the *cause* of the parent’s disgust. This misidentification of the meaning of the parent’s disgust is, nevertheless, coupled by the persisting

enigma, which really has not been answered. In analysis, then, the re-emerging of this traumatic event allows the analysand to face the enigma once more and to integrate, in a meaningful way, the void left by it with her own subjectivity, allowing the repetitive symptoms to fade away.

With these quick (and simplified) basic notions in mind, let us now rethink the chain need-demand-desire. The stage where need is transposed into demand, that is, when need ‘enters existence’ and acquires meaning through demand (and not *vice versa*!) as a separate and independent ‘something’, can be called, with important reservations, the stage of the Real. That is to say, it is through the markings upon the body by the (m)other that a traumatic ‘lack’ enters—is retroactively construed into—the field of signification and enjoyment, in turn generating the phantasmatic conception of and repetitive longing for a totality that is *now* (phantasmatically) lost; a longing to be One (that is, to not-*be* an individual) and not separate (that is, to *be* an individual). In the so-called order or stage of the real, it is *as if* the traumatic sense and lack buried in the unconscious and awaiting to be named is an always-already loss of unity, which one craves to undo. In other words, the ‘sense’ or ‘existence’ of the Real is always-already lost in the stage or order of the Real; a trauma that repeats itself constantly in the life of the subject.

This stage of phantasmatic, yet, allegedly, traumatic separation is immanent to what the child (or rather the subject in analysis) comes to perceive as its “fragmented” body/self (Lacan 2001c, p. 3) when entering the succeeding (or rather preceding) stage, namely the Imaginary, as illustrated by Lacan’s famous “mirror stage”. Here, in the Imaginary, the child comes, for the first time, to see or rather assume in its mirror image *itself as a unity*, a seeing/assumption that comes with a stark contrast to the, alleged, body/self left “fragmented” by the ‘markings’ of the (m)other (in the stage of the Real). Here are some central passages from Lacan’s seminal paper “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” delivered in 1949 at the sixteenth international congress of psychoanalysis.

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infans stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form. (Lacan 2001c, pp. 1-2)

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus, to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications (Ibid., p. 3) [...] a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder. (Ibid., p. 5)

There is of course nothing 'as such' about the mirror image that portrays the child as a unity or totality in contrast to a fragmented self/body: "What is imagined, in its form that is most devoid of meaning, is consistency. Nothing forces us to imagine consistency, would you believe it." (Lacan 2016, p. 51)<sup>130</sup> Rather, what is, allegedly (and retrospectively) "assumed" here is a kind of paradoxical, confused, fusion of oneness and separateness. First, where does the notion of there being any unity in the mirror image come from? From the other, and the key here is desire, as desire is always desire for the other's desire (one desires to be, according to Lacan, the irresistible *object* of the other's desire; it is through the desire of the other that one accesses one's own enjoyment that belongs to the 'body'). The unity in the mirror image is, then, the unity of the *position* of the other. For, as Lacan notes in his reconsiderations of the mirror stage in *Seminar VIII*, the assumption of the mirror image is directly tied to the child's search for recognition or affirmation by the parents (Fink 2016, pp. 73-75; Lacan 2015). In the mirror stage, then, the child comes to see itself as seen by the other, that is, to see itself as the (semblance of the) other. And here is the point at which the child's becoming of a self is, allegedly, always a misrecognition of the self built upon the image of the other. As the child sees itself as seen by the other (as an other), it sees or assumes a unity that, as it were, phantasmatically represents the unity of the other that it desires. The child becomes One by

130 To note, Lacan's point here has some structural resemblance to Descartes' notion of the faculty of imagination. Namely, as such, the essence of body lacks any qualities (although corporeal objects do have "primary" qualities independently of the human mind), and it is only by virtue of the mind's "turning towards bodies" that bodies are qualified; their *form* depends on mind. Especially with respect to human psychology, 'body' is always something that has its place in the faculty of imagination.

becoming or assuming the *position* of the other, that is, by (mis)recognising itself, by assuming a position other than its own 'reality', the "fragmented body".

As one might note, the mirror stage, in this sense, provides the child with a strategy to keep intact the "anticipation" of total unity—an "asymptotic" approaching of the "Ideal-I" (Lacan 2001c, p. 2)—while at the same time keeping intact the "prohibition of incest". In other words, the mirror stage provides the child with the phantasmatic strategy of maintaining individuality (prohibiting incest/total unity with the (m)other) while at the same time fusing the other into the structure of individuality/individuation by *assuming the position of the other through the image*. Perhaps one might say that the phantasmatic and paradoxical nature of the assumption of the mirror image provides the child with the fantasy that it, in and through its own persona, the "Ideal-I", now possesses (has merged with) the other, the 'lost' object of the demand for unconditional love. Again, such a strategy is, Lacan stresses, nevertheless "asymptotic".

The Imaginary is then, in turn, succeeded—or rather preceded, in the exact psychoanalytic sense—by the Symbolic order, which "is", as David Fryer notes, "in fact the only *actual* stage, the stage from which the other two are posited" (Fryer 2004, p. 53). This is why Lacan, as we saw, stresses, in Seminar II (Lacan 1988), that it is the human being's commitment to a *symbolic world*—not its assumption of the mirror image—that decentres the subject. In a formal sense, the Symbolic order is (retroactively) characterised by the move "from the duality of the Imaginary into the trifold structure of the social order, and in which the child takes up its position as a sexually differentiated social-linguistic being." (Fryer 2004, p. 53) That is, the individual becomes a full subject (and thus the "trauma", the split or alienation, of the subject is realised) only as it enters into the social-symbolic order of sexed beings through the Oedipal drama<sup>131</sup>. More precisely, it is only when the 'father' (the other of the primordial (m)other) 'enters' (is retrospectively construed as entering) in-between the (phantasmatic and retrospectively construed) child-mother dyad and its 'preceding' unity, that the child is 'forced' to position itself in relation to the linguistic-symbolic order

131 However, as one should note, in contrast to Freud, for Lacan the Oedipus complex is itself but a symptom/representation of a dilemma pertaining to the subject's phantasmatic creation of the lost unity as it enters the Symbolic order and sexual differentiation (cf. Verhaeghe 2009). In other words, the actual dilemma here is not that one actually desires to kill one's father and sleep with one's mother. Rather, the Oedipal drama reflects the unconscious dilemma or trauma that is involved in becoming a subject through the positioning and desire of the Other, i.e. the symbolic order, which one has not oneself created or defined, but through which one becomes. As Paul Verhaeghe notes: "Lacan considers the classic Oedipus complex to be Freud's wishful dream. The neurotic subject dreams up for himself a strong father with whom he can start a reassuring fight, reassuring because it allows him to leave behind another fight and another threat. The latter are associated with the mother, albeit with the mother *as present in the imaginary of the neurotic subject*." (Verhaeghe 2009, p. 33).

that is marked, not only by semblance—a direct identification—but also by an other (father) of the other; marked by sexual-symbolic *difference*. Entering the Symbolic order the child can, and ‘must’, identify with either the mother or the father (semblance), or, following Judith Butler (1999), *perform* fusions and variations of the two—built on semblance nevertheless. However, in the symbolic order no *identification* can ever encompass the two (or the many) in or as a totality. Rather, symbolic sexuation or identification is, necessarily, one of separateness or separation. Hence, the Lacanian formula here would be, as far as I can see, that ‘one’ can never be reduced to a ‘unity’ of ‘two’, as the symbolic unity of ‘two’ presupposes the independence/separateness of each ‘one’. That is, however one posits oneself in relation to the symbolic order of sexed being, that which one becomes is, nevertheless, always what it is only in relation to the other of the other (of imaginary semblance). Or, as Lacan notes: “The imaginary here shows its homogeneity with the real, and it shows that this homogeneity is due solely to the fact of number, in so far as number is binary, 1 and 0. This means that it only supports 2 by dint of 1 not being 0, by dint of 1 *ex-sisting* relative to 0, but it does not *consist* in any of it.” (Lacan 2016, p. 10) To repeat, the (alleged) dilemma that the subject faces as it enters the symbolic order is that its unity as *someone* is a positioning/identification that necessarily/structurally depends on, and is achieved only through, marking itself in relation to what it is not, what it lacks; the other of the other (of imaginary semblance). So, if I assume the position of the father/man, which is itself an identification built on the image of the other, the woman will then consequently be the other (of this other) through which my identity/position has its meaning or order of existence. Hence, in the Symbolic there is no self-sufficient direct identification, no totality; always (also) a lack, difference, separation, otherness.

Consequently, in the Symbolic the totality of the One *phantasmatically* always belongs to “the Other of the Other” (Lacan 2016), with that which the signifier (identity/sex) always is not, with that which it lacks—the Other that holds the key to totality, but which cannot be integrated into the structure of the subject/identity in any other way except as a negativity, a lack. Again, “[t]he subject can be defined in a correct way only through that which forms a relation, through that which means that a subject is a signifier inasmuch as he is represented alongside another signifier.” (Ibid., p. 133)<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the

<sup>132</sup> The reason why ‘Woman’ is always barred, why ‘Woman’ does not exist in the symbolic order, is the very position ‘it’ (The Woman as a signifier) has in the dynamics of desire; the original master signifier and object of desire that is always the Other of the symbolic order of sexuation; the symbolic order is introduced only through the father/phallus that marks the impossibility of direct identification and totality. As the Lacanian saying goes, “woman does not exist” (Lacan 1999, p. 7) or, “[t]here is only barred woman” (Ibid., p. 80). Or: “The full necessity of the human race is that there should be an Other of the Other. This is what is generally called

(alleged) dilemma and fundamental lack that characterises the subject as formed through the symbolic, is not only that the symbolic can never ‘make One’, a totality. For internal to this dilemma is the further disquieting feature that the means of identification, the signifier through which a position of identity is achieved, is not something that can come from the subject itself. Rather, it always comes from the (big) Other. That is, the means (meanings) by which the subject names or speaks of itself *as a signifier* never comes from itself. The Real can never be named *by* the Real; the Real does not speak itself. It is, rather, the Other that ‘speaks’ us (our identity/position).<sup>133</sup> This is why the unconscious—where this negativity keeps repeating itself—is “structured like a language”; why “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other”. Or, as Lacan formulates it in his seminar XI: “I have shown, in a maieutic, eristic way, that one should see in the unconscious the effects of speech on the subject—in so far as these effects are so radically primary that they are properly what determine the status of the subject as subject.” (Lacan 2004, p. 126)

Now the quintessential point here is to recognise that the structures of each register, namely the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, are, as we saw Lacan pointing out, homogeneous. And, more importantly, they are homogeneous because both the Imaginary as well as the Real are construed retroactively from within the Symbolic (and in analysis, where the silent traces of the unconscious are brought into the realm of sense). In other words, as far as I can see, this means that the traumas, fantasies, and misrecognitions internal to the registers of both the Imaginary and the Real must be understood as structured or narrated upon the lack and trauma in the Symbolic. So, for instance, the need that is necessarily expressed as demand, thus generating an incommensurable gap between the two, is nothing but a re-presentation of the “trauma” internal to the Symbolic order’s ‘inability’ to make One. Or, to take another example, the formation of the “Ideal-I” upon the image of the other in the mirror stage, and its inevitable phantasmatic character and misrecognition, is but a re-presentation of the drama of the Symbolic where the subject must become itself (identity) through the Other/Symbolic; an identity that, nevertheless, cannot ‘self-sufficiently’ derive from the individual(’s real) herself.

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God, but which analysis unveils as being quite simply *La femme*, The Woman.” (Lacan 2016, p. 108)

133 Here are some enigmatic quotes from Lacan that correlate with this notion:

“Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man.” (Lacan 2001d, p. 49)

“The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks” (2001e, p. 106).

“This passion of the signifier now becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man it speaks (*ça parle*)” (Lacan 2001b, p. 217).



But what *is* the irresolvable *Ur*-trauma of the alleged incommensurability of the Real and the Symbolic? For the fundamental fantasy of the making of One must be understood as, well, exactly what it is, namely a fantasy. And the fundamental fantasy is, ‘grammatically’, a response, a traumatic response, to an encounter with reality. So what is it that encounters what here? It cannot be that the trauma and the fantasy is caused in and through a clash between the Real and the Symbolic insofar as the Real as the ‘object’ of the fundamental fantasy “is grounded in that it bears no meaning, in that it excludes meaning” (Lacan 2016, pp. 50-51). The Real is “an empty bag”, but not because it does not contain anything, but “since it is able [as a retroactively construed signifier] to contain nothing.” (Lacan 2016, p.10). In other words, it cannot be that the individual is decentred as it enters the Symbolic order and becomes a subject *because* the symbolic clashes with, is incommensurable with, or castrates, the *object* or *substance* of the Real. There simply is no such ‘lost’ substance of the Real.<sup>134</sup> Rather, the Real must be understood as absolutely immanent to the Symbolic. As Lacan notes: “It is indeed the phallus [the signifier] that has the role of verifying the false hole [the Real (of sex)], making it real.” (Lacan 2016, p. 99) ‘In itself’, the Real is nothing, albeit it is that which “possess[es] the value of what is generally called a trauma”. (Lacan 2016, p. 112)

However, if the trauma is not caused by a clash between the substance of the Real and the Symbolic, if the Real is rather the (*Ur*-)form of a trauma, then what is ‘it’ that is so traumatic about being a subject, about entering into the Symbolic order? We have, of course, already touched upon this, but another round, with some new aspects, is in order. Lorenzo Chiesa’s reading of Lacan identifies the lack immanent to the symbolic as “the real impossibility of representing sex” (Chiesa 2016, p. 5), answering to Lacan’s famous claim that “there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship” (Lacan 1999, p. 12). Following the general logic already illustrated above, this “real impossibility” in Chiesa’s account comes to the claim that the “pure difference” (Chiesa 2016, p. 70) that pertains to the “anatomical ‘little difference’” (Chiesa 2016 p. 26) of sex, is itself utterly “indifferent” to the differences between the sexes that are attributed through the symbolic. “[I]ndifference”, Chiesa writes, “contingently becomes difference (i.e., symbolic differentiality, or the phallic logic of sexuation/subjectivation) yet also remains indifferent to difference. What is ‘most real’ as pure difference is the

<sup>134</sup> There are of course interpreters of Lacan who seem to suggest that the object of the Real in fact refers to a prior reality of the organism that is nevertheless always-already lost to sexed beings/subjects (See for instance Paul Verhaeghe 2002; 2009). My reading of Lacan follows, in this respect, interpreters such as Lorenzo Chiesa (Chiesa 2016; 2006), who attempt to articulate, as we will see below, how the Real must be understood as immanent to the Symbolic. My take on the issue will nevertheless be that the Lacanian theory of subjectivity is itself a deadlock, and that the perspective I have tried to identify throughout this thesis might help us out of it.

point of in-difference (i.e. there is no sexual relationship)” (Chiesa 2016, p. 70). In other words, the real of sex is not a signifier, as a signifier is always in a determined sense what it is in relation to its other; a *relational* difference. That is, it the real of sex (retroactively as a signifier) is there only “before we think of it” (Chiesa 2016, p. 24). Hence, “little boys and girls start off their ontogenetic—linguistic and sexual—process of subjectivation from a traumatic encounter with the *indifference* of the anatomical ‘little difference’ (as ‘not part of a logic’) with respect to the symbolic difference of sexuation, which instead always-already surrounds them through adults.” (Chiesa 2016, p. 26)

The absolute “indifference”, or the “pure difference”, of the real of sex *is*, then, according to this reading, the incommensurability between the Symbolic and what is construed through the Symbolic as a (false/empty) signifier, namely the Real or “Nature”.<sup>135</sup> In this sense, the Real is never “lost”, but rather that which, so to speak, fills the gaps left open in the incommensurable relationship between the “real of sex” and the symbolic order.<sup>136</sup> Again, Chiesa’s reading here attempts to answers to yet another one of Lacan’s enigmatic remarks “there is no Other of the Other.” (Lacan 2016, p. 43), or perhaps more precisely, to the claim that “[i]n the place of the Other of the Other, there is no order of existence [...] the real has no existence either.” (Lacan 2016, p. 115) For if the real of sex cannot be represented, if it has no order or position in the symbolic, then the Other of the Other—that is, that which construes or posits the (false) sexual relationship, the phantasmatic (un-castrated) *phallus*—does not exist and there is no *real* sexual relationship that could make a *real* totality. It is, allegedly, this irresolvable lack of sense/meaning to the sense-making being called the subject that is the *Ur*-trauma and keeps repeating itself in the life of the subject.

“To sum up”, Chiesa writes, “(1) indifferent nature gives itself sexually to the child as a logical impasse; (2) this causes the phallic emergence of the two [the Real/0 and the Symbolic/1], and thus nature is retroactively the two of the sex organs; (3) nature as two sexes is again a logical impasse, i.e., the missing of the second sex.” (Chiesa 2016, p. 27) But what exactly, *I* ask, can it *mean* that the utter indifference (the “pure difference”) of nature (the real of sex) “gives *itself* to the child as a logical impasse”? *What* is it that gives *itself*; *what* is it that causes the trauma? Chiesa *says*, “indifferent nature”, or “pure difference”. That is, Chiesa

135 “I shall say that what specifies Nature *per se* is that it is not a nature, hence logical process as a means of broaching it. Through the process of calling Nature that which you exclude by the very fact of taking an interest in something, this something becoming differentiated on account of being named, Nature ventures nothing save to affirm itself as a potpourri of what is not the nature of anything.” (Lacan 2016, p. 4)

136 Or, as Žižek puts it: “for Lacan the Real—the Thing—is not so much the inert presence that curves symbolic space (introducing gaps and inconsistencies in it), but, rather, an effect of these gaps and inconsistencies.” (Žižek 2006, p. 73)

names, he signifies, ‘it’: ‘it’ *is* named, signified. How can one name something that is supposed to be unnameable, absolutely outside of the Symbolic, and, simultaneously, attempt to utilise ‘it’ as part of an explanation, an account? Conversely, how could “indifferent nature” ever be anything but a signifier? How could one avoid making sense of it, signifying its *existence*? And if it cannot be anything but a signifier, if it cannot avoid sense-making, how then does it—the ‘pure difference of sex—say anything about anything outside of the web of meaning?

Pressing the same issue from a different angle, think of what it would *mean* for the real of sex to be purely indifferent with respect to the symbolic. One would not only have go on indefinitely repeating—as a form of negative theology—“‘it’ is not this, not this, not this...’. Rather, one would simultaneously have to add that “‘it’ is also *not* not this..., *not* not this..., *not* not this...’. In other words, if the real of sex is absolutely indifferent with respect to the Symbolic, then this seems to *mean* that it is not that the Symbolic lacks the real of sex, for it just as much does *not* lack it. Is this a logical impasse? Perhaps. But does this not simply *mean* that there is no *one sense* in which nature is or can be “indifferent” with respect to the Symbolic, exactly because it, the alleged ‘indifference of Nature’, is supposed to be, is used as a signifier. But does not Chiesa try to give it One sense: as if ‘it’, the signifier “pure difference”, actually was able to reach beyond meaning and ‘hit its target’? A target, moreover, that is supposedly a ‘pure negativity’, that is, a target that cannot, in any meaningful sense, be a ‘target’.<sup>137</sup>

It is of great interest to note the peculiar character of the deadlock the Lacanian theory of subjectivity faces. Namely, the challenge is not the typical/classical philosophical challenge of accounting for how there is meaning or value in the world. Rather, the challenge is the exact opposite: how to unthink

<sup>137</sup> One might compare this (what I take to be) impasse at the heart of the Lacanian theory with a paragraph from Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, and its allusion to the *Tractarian* ‘picture theory of language’ and the inevitable silence of the real. “What reason have we for calling ‘S’ [the sign supposedly used in the private language to refer to the speaker’s sensations] the sign for a sensation? For ‘sensation’ is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.—And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes ‘S’, he has something—and that is all that can be said. ‘Has’ and ‘something’ also belong to our common language.—So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound.—But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described.” (Wittgenstein 1953, §261, p. 93e). Now, as far as I can see, the Lacanina attempt to ‘name’ the ‘real Real’ (in order to make explanatory use of ‘it’ in the theory) is in exactly the same position as the interlocutor in the *Investigations* who tries to ‘name’ the ‘private sensation’. See also Toivakainen (2019; 2017).

meaning within meaning, that is, how to unthink ‘it’ while signifying ‘it’. The problem or question I am trying to capture here is similar to the one I tried to identify in my rewriting of the naturalist mind-body problem in chapter II. Namely, it is hard to see how the Lacanian-Chiesian attempt to identify, to signify, the ‘real of the Real’ as that which is utterly and absolutely indifferent to whatever is signified, can sustain the conditions for any “traumatic encounter”, *which itself is supposed to generate the fantasy of the Real as One, and which in turn seems to be the condition for the identification of the ‘real Real’, namely the real of sex.* And, to continue, why would the fantasy, the Real, structure itself as a fantasy of an absolutely asexual, self-enjoying, substance, especially since it is not at all clear how one can identify, signify, give meaning to that (i.e. the ‘real Real’) which one is supposed to exactly identify, signify, give meaning to? The semblance between the fantasy of an asexual self-enjoying substance and the “pure difference” of the “real of sex” is simply that both are nonsensical ‘pictures’, which really is not a semblance in any meaningful sense—one supposes. Alternatively, the *fantasy* of the asexual self-enjoying substance has meaning, can be made sense of, while “the real of sex” is utterly meaningless. But, then, they seem to have no semblance, no connection. To put it differently, there does not seem to be anything in ‘the real of the Real’ (the alleged indifference of the real of sex/nature) that could account for why the *fantasy* of the Real as One would arise, and in *this* form. How can there be anything traumatic about the fact that language/meaning is *not* something that is construed out of self-referential, self-sufficient, signifiers, but rather essentially characterised by or constituted as relation? Is it not so that the very (non-)idea that meaning could be established by one signifier alone is *not* an idea about meaning? So, what is the “trauma” here about?

### *The real as a signifier*

So far, then, my worry with the Lacanian framework could be characterised as follows. Lacan’s theory of subjectivity seems to be, ultimately, unable to articulate any conditions for the event of the split, the trauma, of human subjectivity. The theory fails, so to speak, to make sense of itself. However, in order to come to the crux of my ‘disagreement’ with the theory, some things need to be further elaborated.

Here is the Lacanian picture once more. There is something, the “real of sex”, which ultimately resists being made sense of; the real Real never speaks, cannot speak, for itself. Or; ‘it’ has nothing to say. Yet, the subject nevertheless urge to pin the real to a signifier; urges to find the ‘missing signifier’ that would bring together self and other in a coherent *totality*. The real is, in other words, an

impossibility immanent to the symbolic as such. And, it is this very feature, this immanent impossibility, which is key to the Lacanian universe. For the ‘trauma’ inherent to the subject’s very formation through the symbolic is never, according to the Lacanian framework, experienced by the subject as such. Rather, it is a lack, a negativity, an enigma, that is always-already there in the Other, in the symbolic *qua* other persons, through which the child becomes a subject. As Chiesa emphasises, the child has an “initial meaningless encounter with sexual difference as already symbolically present in the adults surrounding them, and prior to their own subjectivation” (Chiesa 2016, p. 127). In other words, so I take it, the Symbolic order, as that which situates the subject through a signifying chain, always-already contains a void, an unconscious, *before* any active repression on the child’s part, yet internal to the very becoming of the subject. In this sense, the *Urverdrängung* of the subject is the repression *in* the Other (the adults, themselves ‘spoken by the Symbolic’); the unconscious of the subject is, primordially, the unconscious of/in the Other (cf. Zupančič 2017, p. 11).<sup>138</sup>

Consequently, the immanent impossibility inevitably produces, in the sense-making being (the subject), an inherent repetitive symptom. As Žižek for instance notes, psychoanalytic theory was eventually faced with the question of “how to account for patients who have, beyond any doubt, gone through their fantasy, who have obtained distance from the fantasy-framework of their reality, but whose key symptom still persists? How do we explain this fact? What to do with a symptom, with this pathological formation, which persists not only

138 This notion of *Urverdrängung* plays with the image of the *Ur*-scene—as Freud freely did (e.g. Freud 1913; 1918)—while, on the other hand, suggests that there has never been any specific person or event that was the first to repress the real of sex. Rather, this is simply how human subjectivity has always-already been. To what extent one can make sense of this is obviously part of my critique. Moreover, as might be noted, the idea of *Urverdrängung* has structural similarities with Hobbes’ idea of the ‘natural state of man’. For while Hobbes, on the one hand, builds his whole theory of the ethical or moral subject as becoming only through the Law—“where no law, no injustice” (Hobbes 1998, p. 85)—on the premise that the natural state of man is “a war, as if of every man, against every man” (Ibid., p. 84), he at the same time notes that there has in fact “never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another” (Ibid., p. 85), although “in all times, kings, and persons of sovereign authority” (Ibid., p. 85) and other ‘artificial persons’ have been in war against each other. In fact, Hobbes suggests that *particular individuals* have never been in a state of nature because the infant is, “in the condition of mere nature”, always-already “in the power of the mother” (Ibid., pp. 133–134). That is, each individual is, from the very start, in fact always-already subject to Law and authority and hence, if one follows Hobbes’ own theory, embedded in ‘morality’. So, paradoxically, no individual can ever be in what Hobbes terms “state of nature”—that is, outside of Law and thus in an *amoral* state—because the state of nature always-already includes the individual under Law (morality) through the *mother*. In this sense, although a premise for the theory as such, there has never been, according to the theory, anyone that has ‘originally’ suppressed/repressed nature or the natural state of man under Law. *Human* Nature has always-already been suppressed/repressed, always-already been subject to Law/authority.

beyond its interpretation, but even beyond fantasy?” (Žižek 1991, p. 207) This *inevitable* “pathological formation” of the subject is, however, pathological only in the sense that the repetitive movement is nothing but the speaking being articulating or signifying the real incommensurability or negativity inherent in the symbolic *qua* being. Hence, insofar as the subject *is* a sense-making being, it is constitutively symptomatic. Importantly then, the lack of the ultimate signifier is not a lack in the subject’s capacity/potency (cf. the notion of prohibition above), but rather internal to the very nature of the symbolic *qua* subject. Moreover, the consistency of the subject is never *real*. Or, it is real only *as* a signifier. Alternatively, the sense of the subject is nothing but the subject’s own sense-making (of itself) in the symbolic, and cannot be pinned down to or derived from the ‘real Real’; from a substance, from Nature. This in turn sets the background for Lacan’s suggestion that the truth of subjectivity is, so to speak, achieved through, not of a *belief* in one’s (fundamental) symptom—where the subject remains in hope of a re-union with the real—but through an *identification* with it. That is, it is only through the insight that the sense of our subjectivity cannot be grounded in a real or in nature that we can, as it were, be the symptoms, the “*sinthomes*”, that we *are*.

Should the symbolic thereby come free [through a certain ‘insight’], as I once noted it would, we have a way of mending it, which is to fashion what I defined for the first time as a *sinthome*. This is the item that enables the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real to go on holding together, even though here none of them are actually holding on to any of the others”. (Lacan 2016, p. 77)

Analysis, then, does not lead the subject to a discovery of a missing signifier (the real real). Rather, as Zupančič stresses, analysis helps the analysand to *produce* a “new signifier”, to produce a ‘real’—the event of identification with the symptom—that “can work as an emancipatory weapon” (Zupančič 2017, p. 126), as it is only a “letter” that “can disentangle what exists only in entangled form” (Ibid., p. 128). The real of and for the sense-making being, the subject, “can only be a letter” (Ibid. p.131)

### *The response to and the responsibility for the real*

I hope that it is clear to the reader that I appreciate the sophistication of the Lacanian theory (excuse the generalisation!) and its genuine strive to push the logic of human subjectivity to its limits. Moreover, I hope that it is also somewhat clear that the perspective I have been trying to open up throughout

this thesis is to some extent inspired by Lacanian theory and shares central thoughts and themes with it. This closeness between my own perspective and the Lacanian one makes it quite challenging—for me—to really find the point at which a *real* difference surfaces—and equally, what the *real* similarity or closeness lies. This is, however, what I will attempt to clarify now.

I have been characterising my critique of Lacanian theory in terms of an impasse, namely that there is something, so to speak, grammatically suspect about the way in which the ‘real’ figures in the theory and about the way in which the fundamental split internal to human subjectivity is conceived of. Although I do not want to withdraw these suspicions, I am not sure if ‘impasse’ is the best or most informative way of characterising the situation. In fact, I think that Lacanian theory does capture something important and true with its notion of an lack or impossibility immanent to the symbolic (meaning). Only that it simultaneously misidentifies this impossibility as pertaining to *meaning*, which, consequently, also leads to a certain misidentification of what is at the core of the human struggle—or so I would argue. Allow me to elaborate on this a bit.

Take, for instance, the Lacanian notion of *Urverdrängung*; something that is always-already there in the Other “*as the signifying form* pertaining to discursivity as such.” (Zupančič 2017, p. 11). Now there is a sense in which I cannot but agree with this. That is, to the extent that the other(s)—through and in relation to whom subjectivity becomes—has something repressed in themselves, this repression will be inseparable from the symbolic structure, the grammar, in which the subject orientates itself. Nonetheless, and this is a crucial point, it seems to me that we cannot hereby say that the repressed enigma in the other determines how the subject/the child must, necessarily, *respond* to it. In other words, it is hard to see how there could be anything about the repressed in the other that necessitates a specific response and, consequently, necessitates how the subject understands, or misunderstands, itself.

Let us return to the example discussed above of a parent’s persistent disgust-response to its defecating child; a response and signification that suggests that it is the *child* that is the *cause* of the disgust. As pointed out earlier, it is certainly true that such an expression of disgust has no ‘real’ connection either to the excrement or to the child *itself* and lacks, in this sense, any meaning: neither the child nor the excrement possess *in themselves* the ‘quality’ of ‘disgust’. Or, rather, the meaning of the parent’s disgust is elsewhere. However, what the parent’s response (will come) to *mean* to the child—and the child’s relationship to the parent—is not determined simply by the repression already there in the other. Again, there is, as far as I can see, nothing that *necessarily* hinders the child from simply acknowledging this meaninglessness (this enigma) in the parent’s response and to, in turn, respond to the parent in this spirit. Nothing, in other words, necessitates the child to misidentify the disgust as somehow caused by

the child itself—as if the child’s excrements somehow also stained its soul. Nothing except, of course, the child’s own *response*; its urge to defend itself against the lack of any guarantee of the real of desire—which in such cases suffers a serious blow. For, as I have been arguing, it is exactly in displacing our desire in hope of securing the other’s desire that we become, so to speak, object-orientated. Likewise, it is the displaced object-orientated desire that makes it possible for the parent to misidentify his/her disgust as caused the *child-as-an-object*. And, it is only when all of this is in place, that misidentifications of the kind discussed here can be made: the child is now, both for itself and for the parent, an object that either has or does not have the *properties/characteristics* that correlate with the other’s desire. Only that a subject cannot *be* an object—as even the naturalists keep on rediscovering. Nor can the desire of the other ever find its home in an object *qua* a position in the symbolic order. Only affirmation can do so.

I see no reason for why the same would not equally apply to the question of ‘sex’—as the, allegedly, constitutive signifier of the subject’s position. For while it might be true that the symbolic position of sexual identity cannot ‘as such’ be derived from the ‘given’, from ‘nature’ (as if ‘natural’ objects were equipped with their own inherent name tags), the question here is, as far as I can see, why we, nevertheless, close the openness of our being *qua* desire and think that what we *are*, must somehow be pinned down to a (totalising) signifier. Rather, what ultimately *is* the subject, or rather the *person*, is essentially tied to the *response* to, the desire for, the other.<sup>139</sup> But again, if this is correct, then this means that the enigma *in the other*—*Urverdrängung*—must itself equally be understood as essentially tied to the other’s *response*—tied to desire and responsibility. *Urverdrängung* is itself, grammatically, a response.

Here, then, is a central aspect of my ‘disagreement’ with Lacanian theory: It seems that Lacan is ultimately unable to make-sense of what it is we and the other are *responding* to in our desire for the other’s desire.<sup>140</sup> For if the *Urverdrängung* is itself grammatically tied to a response, as I argue it is, then the Lacanina dictum would have to, nevertheless, include an *Ur*-response, rather than *simply* a pure void or negativity that is always-already there in the structure of the symbolic. The *Urverdrängung* is, then, apropos of Original sin, that we have (retroactively) already responded before we make sense of it. Moreover, my

<sup>139</sup> By this I am in effect saying that although retroactive in its nature—as sense-making is in general—the formation of the subject is inseparable from its *responsibility* for its own being. Being is, in this sense, ours to bear.

<sup>140</sup> Moreover, this failure to make sense is not something that confirms the crux of Lacanina theory—although Lacan perhaps (secretly/esoterically) thought so—since the desire internal to the theory is, nonetheless, to make, well, sense.



claim has been that the Lacanian ‘real Real’, the pure negativity immanent to the symbolic, cannot be something that we respond to, exactly because, strictly speaking, there is nothing there to respond to.

It is perhaps not so much that I have been able to show, once and for all, that Lacanian theory fails—for my persisting on the impossibility of the notion of an immanent lack or negativity of meaning *within* meaning obviously might just propel the loop of ‘argumentation’ into another cycle. That the impossibility reproduces itself in Lacanian theory can be made to verify both my critique, just as well as the Lacanian claim. Rather, read my critique as simply suggesting another logic, which, arguably, answers—more meaningfully, I think—to the same constitutive enigma that Lacanian theory addresses. So, instead of being underpinned by a ‘real’ impossibility immanent to being *qua* the symbolic, my alternative suggestion has been that the fantasy of the totalising signifier (an idea or thought that lacks itself) is in fact simultaneously expressive of a fear and a longing for, what I have called, the real of desire or expressive openness between self and other. This is what I took Wittgenstein’s so-called private language argument to illustrate with quite profound simplicity by exposing that the grammar of the fantasy of the totalising signifier is *not* in fact a desire for the impossible *object* of the fantasy, but rather underpinned by a desire for open expressiveness; a desire for desire.<sup>141</sup> Hence, my suggestion is that the enigma internal to the subject’s being must be understood as itself a response to the hideous reality of desire, as characterised by me in both chapter IV and earlier in this chapter.

However, and consequently, there is surely something that we, apropos of Lacan, ultimately lack. As I have tried to argue, what we do lack (what does not make sense, what is a non-thought) are ultimate explanations or ‘accounts’ of meaning, understanding, desire, and the displacement of desire—all intricately, essentially, grammatically, entangled. Moreover, we lack ultimate explanations for these (the notion itself is senseless) because thought (and consequently, the thought that one ought to have ultimate explanations) is itself always-already within meaning-understanding; there is no (meaningful) perspective ‘outside’ of it. As Wittgenstein keeps on showing in the *Investigations*, there is always a point at which explanations come to an end before ‘everything’ is explained. Or, alternatively, explanations that reach ‘an end’ do so only because the explanation already presupposed what it set out to explain. Similarly, there is no ultimate

<sup>141</sup> It might be informative to characterise the point at which my notion of desire departs from the Lacanian one. As we saw Žižek suggest, the ultimate logic of (the Lacanian notion of) desire is to reproduce itself as desire. Now I agree with the idea that desire is, in the end, only about desire. Only that in my view, it is not an economy of reproduction of desire that makes desire ‘about itself’. Rather, as I have argued, what makes desire ultimately ‘about itself’ is the fully cycle of desire: desire is desiring to be desired as desiring.

explanation for why desire is *what* it is, or *why* it exists in the first place, exactly because explanations are always-already discursive and discourse embedded in/with desire. Nor do we have, as I have argued, any ultimate explanation for why we displace our desire, over and above that we do it, exactly because it is *our* displacement, it is *our* response. —There is no room for an explanation to crack open a gap between the displacement and our response/responsibility, as this would always entail an ‘explaining away’, an externalisation of what the very meaning of response/responsibility does not allow for. However, and this is a central point, to say that we ultimately lack explanations for the ‘real’ (of meaning-understanding and desire) is not to say that the real ultimately lacks or resists sense(-making), that it is utterly indifferent to meaning. On the contrary, the situation, the moral-existential challenge, is the exact opposite. Namely, we lack any ultimate explanations of the real because meaning-understanding and desire are, so to speak, nothing but meaning; absolutely meaningful. As I have tried to argue, the real of desire—the desire to be desire by the other as one who *desires* the other—implies an openness, fullness, a limitlessness of meaning in that desire not only answers to what we are, but, importantly, to what we (continuously) become. Displacing the real of desire means, in a formative sense, replacing the real, non-guaranteed, and open desire with (social) affirmation, phantasmatically struggling to become an irresistible *object* of the other’s desire; the ultimate, pure, signifier. This displacement consequently kills off the openness of meaning *qua* being and construes a ‘picture’ of meaning as determined by the ‘order’ or ‘rules’ of the symbolic—the symbolic which in reality lacks the conditions for securing the other’s desire. And it is exactly because of this that the ‘real’ lack or negativity (the non-thought) internal to the symbolic is not the *meaning* of the real, but rather an ultimate explanation of it, as explanations, by their very form/grammar, always have a ‘distance’ to, a certain perspective of control and domination over, what it pursues to explain. In short, Lacanian theory seems to entertain a ‘picture’ of language/meaning that sides explanation and meaning too closely to each other.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> For those acquainted with the ‘earlier’ Wittgenstein and his ‘picture theory of language’ in the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1933) and its famous last words “[w]hereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent (Wittgenstein 1933, § 7; p. 189), will perhaps see that I am suggesting that the Lacanian notion comes too close to the *Tractarian* one. Namely, the real—to use Lacan’s terminology, not Wittgenstein’s—that falls outside of the scope of meaningful propositions in the *Tractatus*, is contrasted to propositions of natural science (Ibid., § 6.53; p. 189). Not to say that Lacan suggests that natural science sets the paradigm of meaningful speech. Only that what makes the real fall outside of meaning and the ‘world’ in *Tractatus* is exactly that ‘it’ escapes any ultimate account or explanation, just as I would argue is the case with the Lacanian real (cf. Zupančič 2017, especially pp. 68-70). The notion of meaning-understanding that I have developed throughout the thesis, is more in tune, so I would argue, with Wittgenstein’s ‘later’ considerations on language and meaning, which essentially combatted the displacements that

In contrast, then, to the Lacanian outlook, my proposal is that there is no real or immanent impossibility of being conditioning the subject. There is, for sure, a ‘logical’ lack of any guarantee for the real of desire. Yet this lack only arises, comes into being as a lack, through a fearful response. A fearful response, moreover, expressive of the urge to undo the real (of desire) out of which it itself is, nonetheless, born; a self-negation—a death drive, although not quite similar to the Lacanian one. Furthermore, the real of desire is never emptied, meaning is never ‘finalised’, but not because it essentially lacks meaning, but rather because it can never stop being, and becoming, meaningful.

### *Some additional remarks*

What I am indicating or suggesting is that both the picture of meaning as something formed in the understanding and openness in-between individuals, as well as the picture of displacement of desire through the search for (social) affirmation, which I have developed especially in the preceding chapter and earlier in this chapter, suggests a way to break the deadlocks to which Lacan’s theory also falls prey to. I agree with the Lacanian claim that both meaning and subjectivity are structured as and in *relation*. Where I disagree is that there could be anything about the way in which our essential relatedness contrasts itself to a ‘pre-symbolic reality’ that could generate a “trauma”, let alone leave the subject decentred. Instead, I have argued that the displacement of the soul (‘inner’) from the other (the ‘outer’) must be understood as a (fearful) response to the very reality *internal to* the relationship, the very reality of the relationality of the self; the very way in which what we are is always-already constituted in our relationship to other individuals through desire. In other words, the reactive response to the relational essence of subjectivity and meaning stems not from anything ‘prior’ to this relationality, prior to desire, but rather from *within* the ‘real of the relationship’, from *within* the naked openness of desire and meaning and the lack of any guarantee of the fulfilment of desire; from *within* the lack of any endpoint to the search for meaning.

The very attempt to secure the desire of the other through displacing it in the struggle for affirmation is, of course, ridden with paradox. Think for instance of the following. The struggle for (social) affirmation presupposes that specific individuals are ready to take on the position of the big Other, ready to affirm the one who seeks affirmation. Yet, such a presupposition in turn presupposes that

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Wittgenstein himself thought to have characterised his earlier thinking. Again, the so-called private language argument in the *Investigations* is, arguably, a prime example of the way in which Wittgenstein rethought his ideas in the *Tractatus*.

the others, whose affirmation one seeks, are driven by the same desire and displacement as oneself; presupposes that their desire has become object-orientated. That is, what is presupposed in the search for affirmation and the security it is supposed to ensure, is that other individuals in fact also desire you, albeit is bent on displacing this desire to the game of affirmation through the Other. For if not, there would be no reason, no desire, for the other to affirm the one that seeks affirmation, let alone invest in the game of affirmation all together. To assume the position of the big Other in affirming another *is* to (re)produce the very structure that provides the escape, the displacement, of desire, which in turn presupposes that the one assuming the position of the big Other is in need of this structure. Or, seen from a different angle, the logic of affirmation hinges on a (hidden) reciprocal desire between the affirmed and the one affirming. Namely, while the *search* for affirmation hinges on the desire for the Other's (and hence *an* other's) desire, the very position of authority (the big Other) likewise hinges on the figure of authority desiring 'its subject's affirmation *qua* desire. Without this mutual, yet displaced desire, affirmation and the position of the big Other—as the guarantor of the signifier— would not exist. Instead, all that would be left would be violent struggle (for power?), without recognition of the other's position as 'authority' and 'subject'.

Here, then, is the paradox I am trying to articulate: One displaces the real of desire in order to secure affirmation (desire *minus* the real). Yet, affirmation itself would not work, would be senseless, without the real of the other's desire. In short, we fear the lack of the other's desire (for our desire), yet presuppose it (grammatically, unconsciously) in our struggle to defend ourselves against the (potential) lack of it.

### Displacing Desire and the Rise of the One: Three Examples

It is important to stress that my critique of Lacan, and somewhat indirectly of the Augustinian-Cartesian, not to speak of the naturalists framework, does not deny that our subjectivity is split, that the anxiety about the relationship between the individual and the other (and the Other), the inner and the outer, is real or actual. Nor do I deny, and this is an important point, that the split in human subjectivity is *original*, always-already there, insofar as we do in fact split ourselves—from the very beginning.<sup>143</sup> Yet, while I claim that the split in

<sup>143</sup> Again, this is something that I believe is adequately captured in Augustine's interpretation of Original Sin. Namely, as he notes, the only true source of Adam's and Eve's fall from Paradise can be accounted for in terms of their will to "live for themselves" (Augustine 1952a). The devil,

humans is *original*, this nevertheless *does not* mean that it is inevitable, irresolvable, necessary, structural. My central point is simply that the split is internal to our responses (our responsibility) *as individuals* to our lives with others.

Now in the last part of this chapter I will attempt to enrich the picture I have been drawing by way of short discussions on three different modes of displacement and their moral-existential dynamics. These examples will partly re-emphasise things that have already been put forth, while new details and dimensions will also surface.

### *The force and impotence of the big Other*

I have *not* wanted to suggest that it is untrue that “the symbolic difference of sexuation, which [...] always-already surrounds the child through adults.” *can* and *most probably* does amount to a “traumatic encounter” (Chiesa 2016, p. 26). Only that the trauma here cannot be detached from the subject’s response to whatever reality puts forth, and the responsibility for this response. What I want to do in this subsection is to continue to explore, in a rough and sketchy manner, what I mean by this “can” and “most probably does”, and how the “trauma” involved is rooted in the real of desire and its displacement. My point is, once more, that the Ur-trauma of human subjectivity does not concern any pre-human or pre-Symbolic reality or materiality, any reality prior to meaning. Rather, the trauma is immanent to the individual’s constitutive relationship to and desire for other individuals. Importantly, by this I do not mean to suggest that there is no such thing as pre-humanity or the pre-Symbolic. My point is simply that the trauma that comes to expression in the Lacanian theory, and in the so-called mind-body problem more generally, does not concern pre-human or pre-symbolic reality. And the ‘evidence’ for it is exactly that the trauma/displacement construes any pre-symbolic, any non-relational element as itself empty, senseless. I re-emphasise this basic outlook here again because it is of essential importance for the illustrations I am about to sketch.

As a, let us call it, descriptive matter of fact, it is hard to see how a child would *not* encounter existential difficulties and anxiety with respect to different normative requirements—not the least sexual identities—always-already surrounding it through parents and ‘society’. That is, it is quite hard to see how a

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disguised in the form of the serpent, could only draw upon this trait and utilise it, but could not create it. It was already, originally, there in humans as a *potential*, and the potential as part of the *meaning* of their free will. Nothing in the structure of reality, not even the incommensurable gap between the point of existence and non-existence, that is, the point at which existence springs out of non-existence through the act of creation, accounts for the Fall and human self-alienation.

child would escape internal conflicts arising in relation to for instance gender identities and their normative requirements, *to the extent these normative requirements (also) manifest or express the ways in which human beings tend to shut themselves off from each other and create normative systems to manage and control the moral-existential angst associated with the hideous reality of desire*. In other words, what I want to suggest is that in order for a, say, gender norm to be an *imposition*, that is, in order for it to create a conflict *in* the child's desire *qua* being, the norm must in fact mark an intrusion in the relationship and desire between the child and the parent. So, in contrast to what Lacanians seem to suggest, and despite the fact that symbolic sexuation belongs to specific social conventions and not immanently to the 'real of Nature', simply assuming certain ways of expression, a certain taste, certain habits and appearances, cannot just 'as such' be in conflict with the child's own reality, since the child, *as a child that desires*, does not have any 'real' independent of its relatedness to others. Moreover, the mere fact that identity, structurally speaking, always hinges on its non-self (the other of the other), cannot as such cause any trauma because there is in effect *nothing* here that counts as an absolute contrast to 'relationality'. It is, rather, only in relation to an *actual* conflict in the relationship between the child and the other that something stemming from a 'social convention' can become an 'imposition' and cause a trauma, a split or self-alienation. Or, this is what I want to claim, anyway.

Let us imagine that a child and its parent are playing around in an open and loving spirit. Now as noted, despite the open expressiveness between child and parent, no matter how the child comes to express itself—regardless of how it moves, dresses, etc.—these expressions are formed in relation to the parent and, consequently, for the most part—and for various reasons—also in relation to the social and normative conventions of a given culture. Yet, this formation will not be a straightforward replication of given norms and conventions in that, as Lacan notes, every single one of us, from one instant to the next, "gives a little nudge to the tongue we speak" (Lacan 2016, p. 114). Moreover, and more importantly, the very meaning of what is expressed *comes to life* in and through the expressive relationship between the child and parent. For how the child and the parent understand 'things' is embedded in their understanding of each other—and in how they avoid, distort, displace, this understanding, this desire.

But now, let us suppose that the child, which in this case would be a boy, notices his sister's dress and wants to put it on. It is, I think, quite likely that any parent's (even in today's 'liberal' atmosphere) response would to some extent be conditioned by the historical, political, emotional, etc., weight of gender norms. Consequently, these norms inevitably translate themselves, in some sense, into the parent's response to the child's desire. However, it is essential to note here that the norms have to, so to speak, go through parent. And so, what this will come to mean, how the gender norm will translate itself into the child-parent

relationship, is still undetermined. But let us suppose that the parent says to the child, ‘but dresses are for *girls* and you are a *boy*’. Here, as Lacan rightly notes, the anatomical ‘little difference’ of sex is transmuted into essentialised identities, *but not because of the pure “indifference” of the “little difference”, but rather because of the way it challenges the parent’s own investments in the “big Other”*. Put otherwise, a difference, let us call it a “pure difference”, between the sexes, which as such does not in any given manner imply the type of significance suggested by the parent who ‘effectively’ acts on a social norm, now nevertheless becomes, by way of suggestive hints or more brutal measures, a—or even *the*—difference, which in turn conflicts with the child’s open expressiveness. And here we have a decisive moment at hand. For this response of the parent suggests or plants a split in the child’s desire, as the child’s desire for the parent’s desire is now divided, on account of the parent’s (fearful) response, between the parent’s ‘conditional’ desire or love for the child *through* the normative ‘signifier’ on the one hand, and the child’s desire for the parent’s ‘unconditional’, or rather naked desire, on the other. In other words, it is the distortion of the relationship between the child and the parent and the displacement of their mutual desire, occasioned in this case by the parent’s own fearful response to the ‘real of the child’, which creates the conflict, the trauma. That is, it is not the symbolic order or the normative conventions *just as such*, that does anything here. For *if* the parent would not respond by denying<sup>144</sup> the child its open expressiveness, *then* there would be nothing essentially distorting about the social convention of (in this case) dresses, although challenges would surely be met later on in relation to other people, say, in the kindergarten or in school, exactly insofar as the social convention surrounding gender identities and their aesthetics are structured on denying and conditioning open expressiveness—and do in fact enter the actual relationships between individuals.

This displacement of the desire between the parent and the child takes on the form of an encounter with, and consequently an anxiety with, what we might call authority and law: the parent’s (displaced) desire becomes an authoritarian law that ‘must’ be abided by in order for the child’s desire for the parent’s desire to be realised. That the effective force of law and authority—as opposed to brute (mis)use of power—hinges on desire should be clear. In order for the parent’s desire to become a law, a norm—and note that *it need not do so* (see below)—the

144 It important to note that the case I am illustrating here presupposes that the parent in question wants to *deny* the child the possibility of identifying or simply just liking anything that would put into question its ‘boy’ or ‘male’ identity, and consequently the parent’s own gender identity. This need of course not be the case with every instance of putting into question what a child has preferences for, as one might for instance simply, by putting forth such responses, invite the child to reflect on what gender norms are and how the child (and oneself) feels about them.

parent's desire must itself be desired to such an extent that *affirmation* by the parent outweighs the child's desire for e.g. the dress, or more precisely, the child's desire for open expressiveness—for the desire to wear a dress is, arguably, already from the very start bound to a desire for the other's desire. Yet, the reverse is also true. Namely, the exercise of the authority of the parent rests just as much on the parent's desire for the child's desire. For the child's urge to be affirmed in turn affirms the parent as the authority: one can be an authority only by being recognised as one. So, to the extent the parent (displacedly) desires to be an authority, it desires to be affirmed by the child as one. The grammar of authority is, in other words, also informed by a desire to be desire. There is, then, a kind of reversal of 'power' hidden in the grammar of recognition of authority and law, at least on this level. For one might in a sense just as well say that the parent's authority is itself dependent on the child's authority over the parent, in that the parent needs, desires, the recognition of the child, a recognition and an affirmation that is no-one else's to give but the child's. Or, we might say that the language-game of authority presupposes a mutual address and desire between the 'master and the slave', where who is essentially master and who is slave cannot be determinately settled.

However, is it not quite easy to understand why the child, the individual, is split in two in the face of such circumstances, and given the immense vulnerability of children? Or, should we rather say that it is easy—that it comes naturally or instinctually to us—to *sympathise* with the child's *response* in such circumstances? Are we not, after all, obliged to ask why the child *does* split its inner from its outer, assuming or imitating (for the child) incomprehensible gender-identity requirements—'what is wrong with my desire to wear a dress?'. For, although the child desires the parent's desire, there seems to be no necessity or automatism forcing the child to abandon its open and naked relatedness to the parent. Rather, the only thing that can, in the end, account for the actual assumption of the imposed identity requirement and the abandonment of the 'real of one's desires' is nothing but the very act of displacement of desire itself: the child's urge to assure the parent's desire. To be sure, through the abandonment of the real of desire and the assumption of the 'imposed' gender requirement the child is able to secure, to some extent, the parent's affirmation. Yet, never its desire. For, as argued earlier, in being (socially) affirmed by the parent the child *itself* nevertheless does not receive the desire of the parent since the child has already separated its inner from its outer, its appearance from its 'real'. Or, we should say, the child has created a (in the end phantasmatic) 'real' or 'inner' by structuring its 'outer' in accordance with the law of the Other. Likewise, since the initial problem, in the case we are discussing, is that the parent does not seek the desire of the child itself, but rather of the child as normative conventions prescribe—a desire that is possible only as the child assumes the norm and splits its inner from its outer—the child itself does not



really receive, wholeheartedly, the desire of the *parent* (which is what the child really desires). One might perhaps say that it is the appearance, the social identity that the child assumes, which receives the (displaced) desire of the parent, while, similarly, it is not really the parent him/herself that desires this desire, for this desire (this *object* of desire) is determined by social norms and conventions, and not by the parent—although the parent utilises these norms and conventions in order to distance him/herself from the very naked openness he/she feels threatened by, for whatever reason. By this I mean to say, that on some shadowy level, all of this involves, grammatically, unconsciously, a certain recognition or understanding on the part of the child and the parent alike, that the logic of affirmation cannot in the end really answer to the real of desire.

Obviously, all of this also has to do with vulnerability, especially on the child's part. In order to avoid scorn, dissatisfied hints, accusations, mistreatment, perhaps even abandonment, the child seeks, in its fearful response, to secure the desire of the other the only way it can, namely through affirmation, forming its outer to please the loved one. But, one should ask, does this not exactly show that the dynamics of the split self centres on the immense responsibility that open expressiveness between individuals comes with; the weight of the fact that one cannot by oneself guarantee love *between* persons, guarantee love's reciprocity ('it takes two to tango'), that love so often involves conflict, conflict perhaps to the point of separation, abandonment? In other words, does this not show that the split of the self is the inability, in some fundamental sense the unwillingness, to take on this responsibility of love?

We might of course say that we *cannot demand* such responsibility from a child, and so my suggestions makes no sense. And it is true, I believe, that a parent, that *I*, cannot 'demand' such responsibility from a child, nor from anyone else. But what does the parent's demand, or *my* demand, or the lack of it, have to do with the issue? How do we imagine ourselves to be in the position to demand anything at all from others? But then again, what difference does it make for reality, for the real of desire, whether we demand or do not demand things from each other? For *if* such responsibility is there, what difference does it make what we happen to demand, or not? *If*, again, the issue here is that we could not *imagine* a small child *not* displacing its desire at the face of such immense existential challenges *because* of its vulnerability, aren't we then imagining that other people would in fact abandon the child, or mistreat it, in one way or another, until the norm is simply assumed? Perhaps we think that the process of natural selection has simply eliminated this option from evolution: those who refused to turn away from love or open expressiveness simply did not survive, and so the 'love gene' has simply disappeared. But is this true, can this be true? Would we really abandon those who tried to love us fully? Would we do it so systematically, that loving wholeheartedly simply would become impossible—

and is this our reason for saying that one “cannot see the mind”? Obviously, we know quite well that people are in fact treated badly all the time. But would *you* do this to your child, or to anyone else? —And is this not the essential (moral) question to *you*! Whatever way we may be inclined to think of this issue we cannot, and this is my essential point, think of it in morally neutral terms. For if we say that it is human vulnerability that *causes* humans to (inevitably) split themselves, then we are in fact acknowledging that the problem here is *our own* evil. That is, we are acknowledging *our own* inability to love or care for each other, not because we necessarily ‘cannot’ love, but because we are (morally-existentially) unable, *unwilling* to do so. Any ‘cannot’ here is a moral-existential expression, not a ‘purely logical’ one (whatever that could mean).

### *In need of the big Other*

Adults surely introduce to their children their own displacements lingering in the grammar/unconscious of their expressions. Consequently they introduce, for the very beginning, internalised, socially conditioned, normative identities. Nevertheless, and as argued for earlier, children themselves are, from the very beginning, also eagerly in pursuit of affirmation. In short, children carry with themselves their own *original* narcissistic impulse *qua* displacement of desire; their attempt to guard against the ‘structural’ vulnerability of the ‘real of desire’ by searching for (social) affirmation. It is with a mixture of amusement, care, and discomfort, that one observes the child’s jubilant and enthusiastic search for affirmation of its own self as ‘great’, ‘loveable’, ‘strong’, ‘funny’, ‘cute’ etc. The amusement and discomfort relates directly to the obvious, and to some extent self-aware, pretentiousness of the child’s ‘look at me’, ‘applaud’, ‘I am ... (some superhero or what not)’. It is a (displaced, fearful) desire for the ‘One’ raw and untamed, as one might say.

What the child in a sense plays with here is the double nature of authority, noted above. That is to say, in the child’s calling out for affirmation of itself, the parent is *ascribed* the position of authority, without the parent necessarily desiring it: the child *is in need* of an authority, for it is only an authority—the Other—that can affirm, that can provide the framework needed for the (phantasmatic) ‘One’. That is, it is only the authoritarian position of the other as the *Other* that can, through the act of affirming the position of the signifier, (phantasmatically) ‘secure’ the desire of the other. Yet, although the parent is *ascribed* the position of authority—the one who possesses the power to bestow the sought for affirmation—the child’s jubilant narcissism simultaneously, as it were, challenges, destabilises, or even inverts the power-hierarchy, the position of authority. It is, namely, as if the child tried to own or overtake the meaning of

the word that the phantasmatic Other possesses; as if the other could not but mean, by *this* word *this* child; as if the child would almost force the parent (as the Other, as the authority of law) to have invented *this* word/symbol because of *this* child. Finally, the signifier, and the desire of the Other, finds its home in the child, the (chosen) One. The child itself *is* the (lost) *object* (now found) that the word has always belonged to.

The central observation here is, and again in contrast to what Lacanians seem to suggest (cf. e.g. Lacan 2016, p. 78), that it is not, in such cases, the parent, nor society (the Other) that imposes words and identities on the child. Rather, it is the other way around. That is, the child *seduces* (or imagines itself to be seducing) the parent to take on the role of the 'big Other'. The child, in and through its primary split, that is, because of its displaced and fearful attempt to secure the desire of the other, attempts to impose essentialised words and identities on itself. Obviously, parents' responses depend on their own displacements and self-understanding, but it is nevertheless quite hard not to find the child's seductive attempt—how adorable are not children; and they know it, or they learn it very quickly!—discomforting, even to some extent, or on some level, uncanny. For what one witnesses in these situations is a quite intrusive break in one's relationship with the child, as one perhaps would like nothing else than to *not* be an authority, the Other, but rather explore the relationship in an open, let us call it, *anarchical* spirit. That is, the child's (or adult's just as well) jubilant search for affirmation leaves one, in some sense, feeling abandoned. It is as if one's real desire for the child was insufficient; as if not only the child desired to be someone else, someone invulnerable, omnipotent, but that one would oneself have to be someone else (the big Other), someone one in fact is not and does not desire to be. As if the child thought not only that it itself, its desire, was insufficient, but that oneself—as the parent—and one's desire is so too.

So, although Lacanians might be right in saying that all kinds of socially determined normative identities always-already surround children through adults, that is, can be found there in the historically conditioned milieu of 'the social world', this does not mean that children assume these identities simply because the parents, or society, demands it of them. Indeed, parents may even actively attempt to counteract the child's assumption that there is such a demand and instead try to invite the child to an open search for meaning. Rather, children have their own primitive, defensive, and displaced desire invested here.

*The desire for the authority of law and the denial of moral understanding*

The narcissistic jubilation with which the child immerses itself in the phantasmatic, but effective, power-relation between authority and the subject is not the only instance in which the *function* of authority *is ascribed by the child* to the other/parent, rather than directly *imposed* on the child. Take for instance the example of a small child hurting another child, for whatever reason. Despite its inability to (as of yet) comprehend the full meaning of moral concepts, the hurting as such cannot be separated from an understanding of the moral reality of the act. In hitting the other child, although the other child might have nothing to do with the anger of the abusive child, the mere understanding that one can do harm to the other and thus express one's anger, fury, frustration, implies that one understands the other as someone who can be hurt, as someone who can suffer, and, consequently, as someone who is hurt, suffers, is wronged. Without this, there is no 'hitting'.

Now it quite regularly happens that a child who has wronged another does not itself directly take responsibility for the evil done by asking for forgiveness and showing care for the one who is hurt. Rather, the intervention of an adult is, for the most part (always?) involved. This involvement might take all kinds of forms and directions, but, unfortunately, it is all too often conducted in a 'lawful' spirit. This 'lawful' spirit could, however, be contrasted with admonishment understood as the attempt to simply have the child see or face what it has done, that is, have it face its own moral understanding, and to take responsibility for it.<sup>145</sup> As we all know, even after the admonishment (in the sense I'm referring to here), the child often has difficulties with actually facing its own deeds; openly facing the person wronged and its own moral understanding. Instead, the child is prone to make apologies to the one wronged precisely in a lawful spirit, as a function of answering to a *principle, a rule, a law* that has been broken. It is *as if* the wrong one has committed relates to, or originates from, something else than the suffering of the other; *as if* morality had nothing to do with one's moral understanding (which functioned as the condition for the very 'hitting' of the other).<sup>146</sup> Now while this is obviously a way of dealing with the moral reality of

<sup>145</sup> Importantly, I would like to add, this means that the parent's focus should not simply be on her own child, fixated on getting an apology squeezed out of. For what the child then comes to see is that the parent is first and foremost concerned with how the child behaves (what principle it abides by) and not at all directly with the suffering of the other. So the parent had best be concerned directly with the one who suffers, that is to say, care for the one wronged, in conjunction with the admonishment; the admonisher herself had best be concerned with the other *person* and not with the 'Law of the Other'.

<sup>146</sup> For a lucid account of how the denial of moral understanding leads to an inner-outer or subject-object split, see Nykänen (2019).

the situation, it deals with it in an indirect and unavoidably displaced fashion. For what it in effect does is to provide an escape from direct confrontation with one's moral *understanding*—and the desire conjoined with understanding—by construing the situation *as if* the wrong one has committed is that one has broken a principle, a law—given by an authority that represents original desire, which one wants to secure. And, again, this might not at all be what the admonisher wants the child to do. Rather, it is the child that ascribes to or projects onto the admonisher this role: the child needs an authority in order to escape its own moral understanding and the responsibility such an understanding involves. This in turn constitutes—and is constituted by—a split in the self where one's moral understanding is repressed deep into one's 'inner', while one's 'social behaviour', one's 'outer', answers to a law originating in the Other—that is, in one's own displaced desire for and construction of the Other. Or, alternatively, one's moral understanding, in being hidden deep in the soul, surfaces as an alienated principle that originates only from the outer, the Other, and not from the *real of the relationship/desire*.

Nevertheless, I think it is worth noting that the difficulty and resistance with which children (and adults as well) ask for forgiveness is, in a sense, a *healthy* sign. Imagine a child, after admonishment, jubilantly and without any (moral) friction *apologising* to the one wronged. This would be moral blindness 'at its purest', for it would indicate that the child is exclusively concerned with having itself affirmed by the 'authority'—which the child itself has (co-)created. The difficulty and resistance with which a child asks for forgiveness, on the other hand, indicates a moral sensitivity. It indicates that it is not solely a question of affirmation, but that there is a moral reality involved here that bears the weight of one's existence: it is, at least partly, the moral reality of the wrongdoing that makes even an apology—in contrast to asking for forgiveness and caring for the other—so difficult.<sup>147</sup> In short, the difficulty of simply construing oneself along the lines prescribed by the logic of affirmation, signals that one does not only desire affirmation of one's 'outer', but that there is a moral reality—the *real of desire*—which unavoidably ties together one's desire and one's moral (self-)understanding.

<sup>147</sup> Obviously, what also makes apologies hard is the *shameful* light one is inevitably cast into by 'accepting' that one has something to ask forgiveness for. Yet, while shame might make it hard to apologise because it means that one is seen in a bad light by the authority one wants to be affirmed by, I believe that this does not reduce the immanent pang of conscience which one's moral understanding causes in the face of an evil deed. Rather, if this is the right way of putting it, these two—shame and bad conscience—work in parallel in the split mind and desire of the wrongdoer. For an lucid portrayal of the logic of shame, see Westerlund (2019a)

## Something Resembling a Conclusion

In the *Introduction*, I said something to the effect that the main virtue of the thesis is that it is able to show how one can move from a purely structural mind-body problem to a radically moral-existential one *without* losing touch with the logic and dynamics of the former. I hope the thesis has earned this virtue, at least to some extent. What remains, I gather, is to give some kind of summary of the main claims. This will be, to a large extent, a repetition of what was said in the *Introduction*, but it probably has its place here too.

Undoubtedly, the central claim of the thesis concerns what I have called the real of desire, or the hideous reality of desire. As I have suggested, the full circle of desire is, primarily, constitutively, to be desired by the other as someone who desires the other's desire. In this sense, desire is, so to speak, about itself, about *desire*, and not *object-orientated*. That is, desire is always about the other's and one's own wholehearted desire; to desire *as oneself* the other as *themselves*. The hideous truth about this is, however, that the real of desire lacks any conditions for securing desire. Why this non-guarantee and openness of desire is something we fear, and something we wish to displace, is, in the strictest sense, a mystery. That is, it ultimately lacks any reason or explanation. However, the *meaning* of our fear, the moral-existential weight of our being *qua* desire, is something we all know well. It is exactly that which we respond to when we displace our desire.

As I have argued, the basic form of the displacement of desire is the transmutation of desire into a struggle for (social) affirmation. Affirmation, incorporating all of its paradoxes, has the *sui generis* character of phantasmatically promising a potential securing of the other's desire—the other's desire *minus* (the real of) desire—in that the logic of social affirmation is *object-orientated* while the fearful displacement of desire is directed towards achieving the position of the irresistible *object* of the other's desire. Now, because the real of desire never finds itself as an *object*, but rather continuously lives in-between individuals as desire, I have argued that this means that there is a fundamental openness to the meaning we produce—or perhaps realise—as desiring beings. Consequently, the real of desire is essentially tied to an open and continuous *search for meaning*, while meaning, ultimately, answers to the desire in which meaning 'is alive'. Circular reasoning? Yes, but the circularity is the 'real' feature of the moral-existential truth of desire.

The mind-body problem. What about the 'body', then? My claim has been that 'body'—in the mind-body discourse—is the grammatical space representing the displacement of desire; the irrational, in Platonic terms. What I have been suggesting, and what I have attempted to illustrate, is a gradual shift in the discourse on mind from the 'body' as the object of the social gaze in Plato, to the passionate and "autocratic" 'body' of Augustine and Descartes, and further to the

body as the purely ‘third-person-perspective’ object of scientific discourse in post-Cartesian naturalism. This shift is, so to speak, paralleled by a shift from an interpersonal conception of the soul and the mind-body relation, to a more or less strictly intra-psychoic one. For, as the Platonic conception of ‘body’ loses ground—or is always marginally and poorly acknowledged—and the passionate, autocratic/mechanistic ‘body’ takes its place, the problem or displacement of the will loses its essential tie to the other person and transmutes into a more or less fully intra-psychoic strife between a pure mind/soul built on the model of ascetic mastery, on the one hand, and an essentially corrupt and irrational assembly of autocratic-mechanistic organs on the other. And, arguably, when the moral-existential problem of the will loses touch with the other person and becomes a solely intra-subjective strife, it is not hard to see how and why, even if Descartes still conceptualises the problem or strife in moral terms (“the misuse of the will”), the moral-existential essence gradually starts shifting towards a purely structural problem—the naturalist mind-body problem—exactly because by losing touch with the other person, the mind-body strife loses touch with its moral-existential core. What else could there then be left than compartmentalised epistemology, ontology, ethics, etc., all framed within a (phantasmatically) conceived of ‘neutral’ framework.

Moreover, my claim has been that this shift in the discourse on mind is informed by, or represents, an accumulating externalisation. More precisely, it represents an increasing tendency to attempt to externalise the reasons for our displacements to an external source, to an object or a structural feature of ‘the given’, in which we find ourselves helplessly entrapped, left only with the single hope of struggling to gain an increasing (fundamentally ascetic) power and control over this object or structure. Conversely, playing on or with the notion of Original sin, my argument has been that there is, ultimately, no reason, no explanation, for our displacements over and above, that is, *our* displacements. As I have claimed, the only reason or explanation for our displacements is that we *respond* to the hideous reality of desire the way we do. Our being *qua* desire is our *responsibility*—our response-ability. Put differently, we lack ultimate explanations—the very idea is a non-thought—of the real of desire, its displacement, and of meaning-understanding, because explanations imply, grammatically, a distance, a gap between, as Zupančič formulates it, epistemology and ontology (Zupančič 2017, p. 141). Or, as I would put it, the notion of an ultimate explanation implies, grammatically, a distance between, on the one hand, epistemology *and* ontology and, on the other hand, ethics or morality—a distance that the real of desire cannot sustain.

*An additional observation*

Apropos of the problem of the will, I want to make a short intervention. As I have tried to make clear, the mind-body problem, or rather the mind-body strife, is quintessentially tied to the question of the will in Descartes, Augustine, and Plato. What I have not made clear, although we have touched upon it in passing, is that the question of the will still in some way informs itself in the naturalist mind-body problem, although in a somewhat distorted fashion. How, then, does it do so? Well, because the naturalist mind-body problem is thought to be, apropos of John Searle, how to place “our common-sense conception of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, speech-act performing, rational agents in a world that we believe consists entirely of brute, unconscious, mindless, meaningless, mute physical particle in field of force” (Searle 2002, p.1), the problem of the will is simply reduced to a problem of how to fit ‘free *choice*’ into a deterministic-mechanistic universe. Now, the question of how and why free *choice* has come to occupy the place of the will in the mind-body discourse would require a lengthy treatment<sup>148</sup>, one that we cannot go into here, but which can implicitly be traced in things that have been dealt with throughout this essay. Suffice to say, for the naturalists the question or problem of the (free) will is reducible to the question of how, for instance, the raising of one’s arm can be accounted for in terms of one’s own wilful and conscious doing, instead of the workings of the brain or the empirical fact that certain particles in fields of force ‘meaninglessly’ happen to be where they are at a given moment.<sup>149</sup> Now while it is clear that Augustine, and later on Descartes, already begins to lose touch with the Platonic understanding of the will, the question or problem of the will is nevertheless still, for Descartes, essentially or grammatically tied to the *discourse of reason*. That is, as I have tried to point out, the question and problem of the will—and its tie to the mind-body strife—is not, for Plato, how one can reconcile wilful actions with descriptions of the world that do not include the discourse or the concept of the will (the naturalist problem of the will). Rather, the question of the will—and the mind-body strife—is, for Plato, the contrast between what one sees fit to do and what one (really) wants, where the will is *internal* to the discourse of reason as a search for the ultimate of our desire, namely the good. So, for Plato, the question is not, then, whether or not I am freely able to *choose* to lift my arm or not at any given

<sup>148</sup> My hunch is that something decisive happens, at latest, with Augustine’s conceptualisation of the will, which redirects the Platonic notion of the same (as I have understood it) towards the understanding that the question of free will is one between ‘free choice’ contra “autocratic movements” of the body (cf. Augustine 1952a; 2010).

<sup>149</sup> In recent times some theoreticians claim it has been empirically established that what humans ‘perceive’ to be free and conscious choices made on their behalf, are in fact determined by neurological goings-on *prior* to any conscious experience of will/choice. See Libet *et. al.* (1983)



moment in time and space (cf. Libet *et al.* 1983). Rather, the question is tied to *why* I am lifting my arm—the *meaning* of this action—which is a question (within the mind-body strife) that answers to my rational justification of my deeds. That is, it answers to the way I am able and ready to take responsibility for my deeds; able and ready to tie my soul (my will-desire) undivided to this deed. In the discourse of the will, as understood by Plato (according to my reading), there is, then, no ‘logical space’ for the idea that there would, or should, be a *specific point* in ‘time and space’ where free will or choice must be identified and located. In other words, the question of the will is, in Plato, whether or not what I am doing is a displacement of desire. Naturalist philosophy of mind has, I claim, mis- or displaced the problem of the will, with the help of the Augustinian-Cartesian conceptualisation of the mind-body strife. Consequently, this displacement has created a problem, or rather a research programme, that lends itself essentially to a conception of the nature of the will that increasingly understands the will as an object for control and, consequently, for manipulation.

*A final, retrospective remark*

In retrospect, I would like to make a moderate disclaimer. Namely, in developing my arguments I have, perhaps too hastily, over-simplified or over-generalised the dynamics of how and why the ‘body’ constitutes a strife with the real of the soul/desire. For in arguing that ‘body’—as a disruptive force—is essentially to be understood as the image, sign, or object of the affirmative gaze, I have not discussed seriously enough the ways in which the appetites or pleasure seeking drives of the ‘passionate body’ enter into the picture, as they undoubtedly do. This lack or failure, however, does not, as far as I can see, alter or challenge my claim that the mind-body tension centres on a displacement of desire, on the problem of the will. Yet, I do not give any clear accounts of how and why, say, the appetite for sexual enjoyment, when it does in fact create a dissonance in the soul, when it in fact does displace desire, is a case of a displaced desire for (social) affirmation.

Take for instance the following scenario: I feel desire for a certain person that comes to expression in sexual terms. Yet, at the same time, I feel that this desire comes into conflict with another one, namely my desire for and relationship to another person. Now it might of course be that the conflict in my desire is caused by all kinds of problematic norms and conventions that I have, in my displacements and weakness, internalised. This I do not dispute, although this need not be the case. Nonetheless, my concern here is not with any possible misplaced moralistic conceptions that might inform the conflict, but rather with what I do, how I act, how I bear responsibility, in *this* situation.

Say that I go on to have sex with the person in question. What is the displacement of desire that has occurred here? Essentially, I would claim, the displacement here is not whether or not what I did was 'wrong' or not in (socially) normative terms. Rather, I want to suggest that the actual displacement of desire that occurs here is that I do not open up to the other about my dissonance or conflicting desires and try to resolve the situation—whether or not this in the end would mean refraining from or going on with the intended sexual act. That is, I displace my desire insofar as I act only with, as it were, half of my desire or soul and not wholeheartedly. I, so to speak, leave something out, hide it from the other, and from myself. Now, to the extent that we might say that it is my 'appetite for sex' that in some sense plays part in my suppressing or repressing the truth, the whole of my desire, and to the extent that we might then say that this sexual appetite can be tied to or conceptualised as 'body', it is of course true that the 'body' is part and parcel of my soul-body, inner-outer, strife. Hence, my self-critical, retrospective, question is then: what does this have to do with the dynamics of (social) affirmation?

Obviously, the idea here is to leave the question open, awaiting further engagement. However, I want to end with the following short observation. If the central displacement here, in this case, is my resistance to 'nakedly' open up to the other with the whole of my desire, is this resistance not then tied to my fear of, not only or essentially missing out on sexual enjoyment, but rather to my fear of losing the desire of the other? In fact, one might add, in what sense can we separate my desire for the other's desire from my 'appetite for sex'? Is it not, in other words, what I fear and avoid exactly to have my whole or real desire transpire before the other? And, is this fear not, in turn, bound to my fear that the other will abandon me, see me in a disapproving light? And, furthermore, is this not what makes me suppress or repress the real (whole) of my desire, and to seek to simply be affirmed ('sexually') by the other in the guise of my 'appearance', that is, hiding a part of me within me? Is it not here, in my paranoia, that I separate the other from *herself* and make her, reduce her, to the Other that affirms me in my fearful concealment? Sure, the appetite for sex might come in conflict with my will, but is it not the way in which I *respond* to this conflict, the way in which I turn away from the 'real of my desire' that splits me, that makes the strife what it is?

## *Epilogue*

Standing before another person I find that there are things I desire to say to this person, ways in which I want to reach her soul and have her see, have her feel mine. I hesitate, become anxious, stiff, and swallow my desire. I suppress the truth of myself. The suppression of this truth speaks with, is followed by, two different voices. Or, two different voices manifest the very act of suppression. One voice speaks of reasons for why it is better this way, why, perhaps, the other does not deserve the 'truth of me'. Or, it slanders me for my pettiness, for being a coward. The second voice speaks another language, the language of conscience. As long as the truth of my soul remains concealed, the voice of conscience produces, in the very division or dissonance of my soul, a debt.

I am afraid of how the other will respond. I am afraid of what the real of my desire means, what it would mean for me to stay true to it. On some level I know, I anticipate, what the truth of my soul demands of me, what 'living in truth' means. However, the *picture* attached to this knowledge, to this anticipation, is infused with my *fear* of this truth, with my *fear* of what truth demands of me. The *picture* is a *phantasm* and part and parcel of my justification for the 'belief' that I do not want the truth of my soul, do not want the real of my desire, or that the other does not want it, or does not deserve it. The truth of 'the truth of my soul' is *not* a *picture*, yet this *picture* is, now, my tie to truth. If I did *not* on some level know or anticipate what truth demanded of me, then the uncertainty and vulnerability that surrounds such moments of truth would be like the uncertainty of, and lack of control over, whether it will be sunny or rainy tomorrow—when nothing important hangs on it.

Each time I close myself from the other, each time I turn away from the 'real of my desire' and kill off my open expressiveness, I not only displace my soul and its desire, I not only split myself into an 'inner' and an 'outer', but internal to this split a debt is generated. For I do not give to the other what belongs to her, namely the real of my desire. My soul, my desire, does not *belong* to me, it *belongs* to the other. Something remains *inside* me that belongs to the other.

Such displacements have occurred ever since my very coming into being, and they are essentially tied to my, sometimes, explicitly violent and evil reactions and attitudes towards the other. I cannot remember a time when displacement was *not* part of my soul; I cannot conceive of myself as not always-already having

had this debt on my conscience. How can I ever become whole, if not *again*, then finally? How am I ever to repay this debt? How am I ever to undo my displacements if there are things *in* my 'inner' that belong to others? Long gone are the times when the first displacements took place; how can I ever reach these displacements anymore, how can I ever reach these people anymore? So numerous are my displacements, my sins, that repaying them (to their rightful owners) would leave no room for living. And how could I locate each person I have ever wronged, each person I have ever turned away from? And what about the dead, how can my words, my deeds, pierce to the 'other side'?

How do I want those that have wronged me, those that have turned away from me, those that have not answered my naked and open call, how do I want these persons to repay me? What is forgiveness?

If I am bitter, if I crave revenge, if I, in my bitterness, desire that the other be humiliated as I have suffered humiliation at the hands of the other, I will bitterly want to be asked for forgiveness. Bitterly will I want the other to prosper in front of me, begging *me* for forgiveness. Bitterly will I enjoy having the power, at my sovereign will, to free the other person from her torment, her bad conscience. Bitterly will I exalt myself.

But do I *really* want this? Is this what I *really* desire? Say that I really do love a person, and that this person has wronged me, wronged herself, and our relationship. What does forgiveness mean here?

I do want the other to acknowledge the wrong, the displacements that she is guilty of. But why? As said, supposing I am not bitter but really do love this other person, then I do not want this acknowledgement *for my sake*, so that I can feel good about myself—again. I want it because I want the other person not to displace herself, displace her desire. I do not want her to be alienated from herself, nor from me. I want, I desire, *her*. Her acknowledgement is *hers*, *for* her. It is what it means to see one's displacement, to see the 'real of one's conscience'.

Let us say that the other person in question now acknowledges her wrongdoings, her displacements. What is it that I now desire as the one who has been wronged? She might turn to me, 'confess her sins' and ask me for forgiveness. This might be an important, an essential part of what it means for *her* to acknowledge *her* displacement. But *I*, as the one wronged, do not need, nor do I desire, this confession *as such*. What *I* desire is simply that she no longer displaces herself; that she no longer turns away from me, and herself. To the extent that I do not carry any bitterness in my heart, my desired has never been to forgive her, nor

to be asked for forgiveness. Or; in my love for her I have always-already forgiven her. I simply desire *her as herself*. And this is what my forgiveness consists in: the desire that the other person no longer does wrong, turns away from love, displaces desire. I do not want her to have a bad conscience, even though she might never ask me for forgiveness, even though we will never see each other again. I only want her to be *whole*.

However, as long as she continues her evil, her bitterness, her indifference, her displacements, in my love for her I will long for her to stop, and I will admonish her. I will not, if I dare to love her, accept her displacements and play along as if they were not there. My forgiveness and her repayment of her debt, consists only in her acknowledgement of her displacement and in her desire to be whole, in her desire for me. *And* it consists in the uniting of her words with her deeds.

This is what my forgiveness, in my love, *is*. But, then, this means that this is what being forgiven means *also for me*. To redeem *my* sins is to stop displacing myself and my desire; to stop turning away from others, away from love. This is the only thing others *really want* from me; this is what paying one's debt *means*.

We are prone to entertain the idea that what deeply troubles us, what we deep down desire to rebel against, is the presence of an authority. 'If only', we seem to propose, 'we could be rid of this authority, this law, *then* we would be free to fully enjoy ourselves and life'. In reality, though, the *lack* of any universal *principle*, any universal *law* or *authority*, is more frightening, more intimidating, more devastating, than its existence. In fact, our idea that we want to rebel against the 'big Other' is a way for us to rationalise our *belief* in the 'big Other', our belief in an external moralistic authority. Moreover, this *belief* is a way for us to repress the *lack* of such an authority and the reality of our moral understanding, and its infinite responsibility. A certain *picture* of forgiveness is 'proof' of this 'belief' in the 'big Other'.

No one, no moral principle, no moral law, *demand*s anything from us. It is we ourselves, the 'real of our desire', the 'real of the relationship', that cannot but demand the truth of our moral understanding. No one, no authority, can forgive us. That is, no authority can set us free. Desire, love, is fully ours to bear.

The moment, each moment, I live in love and truth, I *answer* to each and every one I have ever wronged, each and every one I have ever turned away from. *Love pierces through time and space and heals the soul*.

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